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THE EGLAMORE PORTRAITS

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THE PARISH OF HILBY
THE PARISH NURSE
GRAN'MA'S JANE
MRS PETER HOWARD
A WINTER'S TALE
ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS
MOONLIGHT
THE MATING OF A DOVE
THE FIELDS OF DULDITCH
AMONG THE SYRINGAS
SUSANNAH

THE EGLAMORE PORTRAITS

BY
MARY E. MANN
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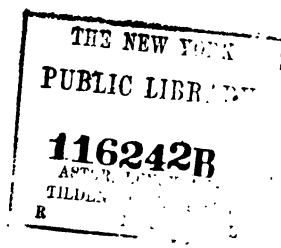
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"THE WORLD HAS NOTHING TO BESTOW;
FROM OUR OWN SELVES OUR JOYS MUST FLOW,
AND THAT DEAR HUT—OUR HOME."

METHUEN & CO.
36 ESSEX STREET W.C.
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THE EGLAMORE PORTRAITS

CHAPTER I

THE EGLAMORES COME HOME

WHEN the Eglamores came home from their wedding trip they were delighted to find the bride's mother on the threshold of their door to receive them. The bride was delighted, that is ; the state of mind of the bridegroom might more accurately be described as one of chastened acquiescence. It was inevitable that his mother-in-law must inspect her daughter's house, it was desirable that she should arrange it in a manner agreeable to her daughter's taste, and give

A

I

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her hints for its management. Clarence Eglamore, the most reasonable of men, knew that these things must be. But when he supplemented his wife's exclamation of joy with the assurance of his pleasure in seeing Mrs Cummin in his own house, he made reservations at the back of his mind.

Since his engagement to her daughter, of her hospitality to him he had no complaint to make. What had gone before must be, if not forgotten, pardoned to a lady who had wished to make a more ambitious match for her only child. Later she had endeavoured to atone to him for former injuries by attentions, by welcomings, by the showerings of benefits. Now was his opportunity to evince his gratitude.

He had had a six weeks' holiday which had been the happiest of his four and

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thirty years. He had not deemed it possible that he could be so happy. That consummate period of the new life upon which he had entered was now over—the period in which his wife had been entirely his and he hers, in which they had lived absolutely each for each as if they veritably had been one flesh, in which love had not only ruled lord of all but had been made the practical business of the day. Although Eglamore did not for a second doubt the happiness before him, he recognised that this halcyonic episode was of the past. The sight of Mrs Cummin on his doorstep helped him to realise the fact.

She turned to him presently, having naturally overlooked him at first, and held out her left hand to him, her right being still held tightly in her daughter's clasp.

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"My dear Clarence!" she said, "and how have you been getting on? Why, you look quite handsome; and five years younger!"

"Yes, mother!" the daughter cried. "Doesn't he look *sweet*? Every day I tell him how positively sweet he looks."

She was telling him so now before the two servants who were engaged with the luggage in the hall. They repeated the remarks afterwards in the kitchen amid yells of laughter; and for days caught each other by the chin between finger and thumb, turned up a common female face, and demanded in accents which only to them would recall the clear, high tones of their young mistress, "Doesn't he look *sweet*?"

"Go in," her husband said, "while I help with the luggage. We can't move

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in this little bit of a hall till the luggage is out of the way."

Mrs Eglamore threw out her two hands with a pretty bewilderment. "Where do I go?" she asked. "I am in my own house, Clarence, but I don't know which way to go!"

"Come here, child; come into the drawing-room," her mother invited, and opened the door on one side of the tiny passage which was dignified by the name of "hall."

"Mother! I call this charming!" Juliet said. "It's the very chintz I chose—the dear, dear boy to get it! And the shelf all round—look!—high up, for the china. And the white walls. He remembered everything! Isn't it a sweet little tot of a room, mother? Oh, I do—I do like it, and think it *sweet*!"

"You really like it, Juliet?" Mrs

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Cummin asked, still holding the girl, but looking round the room; "I'm so relieved. I positively dreaded your coming in, and thought you'd get a shock of disappointment on first seeing it."

Juliet surveyed the room again with a more sober air. "It isn't like the great drawing-room at home, of course," she said. "But, then, I did not expect it to be."

"You should have seen what it was like when I came!" Mrs Cummin exclaimed. "*Such* ornaments on the mantelpiece! And no one able to stir for chairs and tables and footstools."

Juliet laughed. "Where are they?"

"Pushed out of the way in various places. There are a couple of out-houses crammed with superfluous things. The real rubbish, not worth storing, I gave to the maids to get rid of as they liked; and—oh, I don't know! I'll tell you all

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about it afterwards. Such a time I have had! It was just the same all over the house."

"You poor mother! So good of you, mother. I do hope you're not tired? You look just the same. I am so glad to see you, mother! How do I look? I got this new hat in Paris. I didn't want it a bit, but I simply couldn't resist it. I told Clarence so, and he said: 'Then don't resist it.' So I didn't. He says I look sweeter in it than in all my hats. He pays me such compliments! I used not to think I was much—to look at, you know. Now I am as vain as a peacock. And every single thing I like he lets me do. And oh, mother! I've got the very sweetest little present for you. Clarence gave half, and I half. It's in my bag—oh——"

She rushed across the tiny space of

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room as her husband appeared at the door, and seized him by the collar of his coat. "Clarence, is the cab gone?"

"The cab?"

"The cab. Is it gone?" She shook him to hurry his words.

"Of course it's gone."

"Then run! Don't stand staring, you great stupid, darling boy! Run and stop it. My bag!"

"What about your bag?"

"My dressing-bag! It's in the cab; and that sweet little locket with our portraits in we got for mother in Paris——"

"——And about five hundred pounds worth of jewellery besides," her husband added with unruffled calm.

"Clarence has got it all right, dear," the mother said. "Clarence has taken care of his wife's bag, of course. What else is he here for?"

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"It's in his wife's bedroom, silly!" he said, and pinched his Juliet's cheek.

Then he looked round the room. "Hallo!" he said, "this isn't how I arranged it. Where's the round table that stood in the corner, and the box-ottoman, and all the knick-knacks and things?"

"I had them taken away," Mrs Cummin explained. "The room was much too full, Clarence."

"Was it?"

He looked slowly round. He had observant eyes, and they lingered here and there on wall and floor and table, missing what had been familiar.

"I think mother has made it look *sweet*," Juliet said.

"It's a tot of a place," Mrs Cummin declared, with a lifted shoulder, "but it's big enough, I suppose, for you both to

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be happy in. With all my heart, my dears, I hope you will both be happy."

When the women had left him Egla-more took the opportunity to walk round his small domain.

For eight years—since he had become junior partner in his uncle's firm—he had lived a bachelor life there. The life had been a happy and successful one, and the place was dear to him. Such alteration as, with much thought for her, he had decided would be desirable to make on the advent of his wife, he had made. With no lavish expenditure, because he who had been well off as a bachelor would be straitened in income with a wife. Every little addition, therefore, had been carefully considered, every purchase made with calculation; and he was well content with the result. He had given no one leave to upset his arrangements,

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and he was not well pleased to see it done.

He set his under teeth beyond his upper, and projected his lower lip, as his habit was when things were amiss ; he clasped his hands behind his back, and roamed from room to room, taking stock.

“ She has been used to riding it rough-shod over her husband,” he said to himself, “ but——”

The lip was unbecomingly advanced, and his eye was caught by his own reflection in a round, old-fashioned glass in a richly-carved gilt frame which had been banished from its original honourable position on the drawing-room walls to inconspicuous retirement in the little third room. The glass showed him—by no means flatteringly, broadening and shortening a figure already more distinguished for strength than elegance—a sleek dark

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head, a clean-shaved, healthy face, a pair of pale eyes well set beneath a well-moulded brow.

On his appearance he had only quite lately begun to set store ; having, until his marriage, no understanding of how very much women are affected by men's looks ; not having dreamt of the fact that they are as important to them, generally silent on the subject, as the looks of women, about which they make such ado, are to men. With a curiosity not unmixed with anxiety he had gazed at himself once or twice since the revelation had been made. As he now regarded himself he saw that the teeth set forward, the protruded under lip, although indications, perhaps, that over him, Clarence Eglamore, Juliet's mother would not ride an exultant course, did not add to his attractiveness of countenance.

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He settled his face into a more agreeable expression, therefore, and unclasped the hands which were pulling impatiently on each other's fingers behind his back, in order to run them over his already smooth hair. Juliet particularly approved the way it grew to a point in the nape of his dark red neck, she had told him. He remembered the confidence, and his fingers lingered on the indicated spot with a certain tender care.

If he had foreseen he would have taken measures to prevent his house from being interfered with ; but it was done. After all, it would be wisest to accept the inevitable and to say nothing.

An excellent resolution which, even for a few hours, he was unfortunately unable to keep.

For, at dinner that night, while the women talked—each eager to tell the other

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of things which had happened during their separation—and Eglamore listened, a sense of grievance none the less in his heart because he had resolved not to express it, his eyes, noting now this unwelcome innovation, now that, rested on a pair of pictures hung in the recesses, one on either side of the fireplace. They were very handsomely framed copies of pictures by Landseer, and had been presented to his wife on her marriage by the artist herself; a cousin of whose talent the Cummin family, knowing no better perhaps, were proud.

“Wasn’t I, Clarence?” the clear, childishly treble notes of his wife’s voice were repeating. “As limp as a rag—wasn’t I, positively, Clarence?”

“Positively,” he made answer, his eyes on the pictures.

“Mother won’t believe the crossing was so bad. Do tell her, Clarence.”

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"I have crossed five times, and I have never been sick in my life," from Mrs Cummin.

"But I *was*. *Dreadfully!* Clarence—wake up, darling!—do tell mother how sick I was."

Clarence avowed he had never seen anyone so sick before.

"There! Had you, Clarence! I did nothing, mother, but moan and cry and be sick. And afterwards—just a rag! Tell mother, Clarence."

"Just a rag," Clarence repeated.

"And if he hadn't loved me to distraction he never could have been the angel he was to me."

The servant had left the room, they were sitting over dessert. The bride, her blue eyes a-glitter with joy, threw a kiss with graceful, waving hands across the flowers and fruit to her husband, who sat

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with his face turned sideways towards the recesses, and so missed the kiss. Juliet's eyes followed her husband's and lit upon the pictures.

"Oh!" she cried. "How industrious you have been, mother. You have hung Cousin Anna's pictures already. Aren't they clever? Don't they look *sweet* there, Clarence?"

"They do indeed," Clarence said. He had turned in his chair, his elbow on the table, and he drew his fingers slowly down the freshly shaved portion of his cheek. He hardly opened his teeth in speaking, his lower lip stuck out.

"Where are the portraits which hung in those places?" he asked.

"Put away with the other things," Mrs Cummin told him glibly. "There is positively a cart-load of things, Clarence, to go away. I can't think what you'll

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do with them. Such rubbish! Put them in a rummage sale, I should suggest, or let the servants' mothers have them for the carrying home, or——"

"I see," Clarence said, slowly interrupting. "But these—the portraits which hung there—happen to be those of my father and mother, Mrs Cummin."

"Oh!" Juliet cried. Her husband was a reserved man. Until his marriage he had never, unless compelled to do so, mentioned the names of his parents, who were dead. Since that time she had learnt that their memory was very dear to him.

"We can bring them back again," she hastened to say, and looked at him with a concerned face; "Cousin Anna's pictures can go somewhere else, mother."

"There is nowhere they look so well," Mrs Cummin said with her tone of finality.

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"It is the only position in the house which shows them to advantage. I tried them in every room, in every light. I spared no trouble."

"I'm certain you did not, mother," Juliet cried. The elder lady was evidently ruffled. It was an easy matter to offend Mrs Cummin, as they of her household knew well.

"It would be an insult to Cousin Anna and her genius not to give a place of honour to her pictures!"

"And, meanwhile, to what place of dishonour have you banished my father's and mother's portraits?" Clarence asked.

"Well, really, at this moment I can't exactly tax my memory to tell you. The taking down of two old pictures to make room for two new ones didn't strike me as exactly a matter of importance, you see."

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"But wherever they are, I wish to have them found, please," Clarence said. "And I wish them to hang exactly where they did hang; in, as you say, the place of honour."

There fell a silence. Juliet stole an apprehensive glance at her mother, whom she loved as much as she feared, and whose calm she knew to be so easily broken.

"But then, coming home, you know, mother," she began, faintly attempting to return to the earlier, safer topic, "coming home the sea was as calm as calm. Just as when father and you crossed. Clarence and I were on deck all the time, and——"

Mrs Cummin ostentatiously disregarded. She put down the knife and fork with which she had been stripping a banana, and sat backward from the table. "Any arrangement made by me, with the best

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intentions, in your absence, Clarence, but of which you don't approve, you are quite at liberty to alter. But for all our sakes I must ask you to wait until my departure to do so. The servants have seen me — *slaving* — at getting everything into what I consider only decent order in your house. They helped me in the effort. I don't say they did it willingly. The girls are overworked as it is, and I spared them. While we are on the subject I may as well say what I meant to have out with you later. It is ridiculous for you to expect to run this house after any fashion Juliet can approve with only two servants——"

"I think we shall have to try—for a time," Clarence said.

"But I am telling you it is impossible."

"We will, as you said, postpone the

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subject till later. But about putting back my father's and mother's portraits——”

“ Without casting a slight on me before your servants it cannot be done. Surely you can't be serious in wishing to make a mountain out of such a mole-hill.”

“ Don't be so tiresome, you naughty, cantankerous, arguing old boy,” Juliet said.

Clarence said no more, but sat, with an attempt at a smile on his face, and his lower teeth caught upon his upper ones, till the ladies left him.

CHAPTER II

THE LITTLE RIFT

THE spare bedroom of the Eglamore *ménage* was not, in architectural proportions or in sumptuousness of appointment, to compare with the beautifully upholstered chamber which was Mrs Cummin's at Marchmont, her own home. The room dedicated at The Cottage to her use, and into which Juliet followed her mother on the first night of her own home-coming, was pleasant enough, and decently fitted up, but the magnificence of Mrs Cummin seemed to dwarf and to deride the accommodation afforded her. Her gorgeous night-dress bag looked ridiculously out of place on the plain white

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counterpane of the iron bedstead; the silver of her toilet apparatus overflowed from the small dressing - table to the drawers, the narrow chimney - piece, the bedside-table. There was no wardrobe; the lady's costly dresses, her mantles, rich with embroidery and lace, hung on hooks on the door and walls.

The last detail filled Juliet with an abashed dismay. "Oh, mother! Is this really the best we can do for you?" she said. "Oh, I am so sorry! I will speak to Clarence about it, and have a wardrobe put up for you to-morrow."

"My dear, it will do very well," Mrs Cummin said with a somewhat gloomy resignation. "It's only for a few days. I do not think of myself. I have not given myself one thought since I've been here; but I must tell you, Juliet, I have worried about you."

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She put out a hand, and caught her daughter's, and the two sat on the side of the bed together.

"But I'm quite all right, mother," Juliet declared, "as happy as happy. You can't think what a darling Clarence is. You mustn't worry about me."

"But since I've seen his house, Juliet, I have had serious misgivings. You remember how opposed I was to the marriage in the first instance, and the terrible time we all went through?"

Yes. Juliet remembered very well. She pulled her shoulders together in a shudder. "Don't let's talk about it, mother," she said.

But Mrs Cummin had lately begun to see, all over again, that she had been right, and she wished to insist on the fact. "The marriage should have been postponed till Clarence was richer, or

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should have been broken off altogether. I admit that until I came here and saw its limitations I did not thoroughly realise how inadequate is an income of five hundred a year—you and he together make up five hundred, you know—for my daughter to have married on."

"Clarence always warned us the house was small," Juliet reminded her mother. "It is small, of course——" She scanned the dimensions of the room with her young, happy eyes. To her mother such matters were very important; she knew it was because she was such an inexperienced housekeeper that they were not equally so to her. "I don't mind a bit for him and me, mother, if Clarence's house is little or big, but I don't wish you to be inconvenienced. It is dreadful to have your dresses hanging out on

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hooks. I do hope you don't mind very much!"

"It isn't that that matters," Mrs Cummin declared with gravity; "it is the whole thing. The position—Clarence's. The establishment. Are these things suitable to your father's daughter and mine? It is this that has worried me since I came here till I have been unable to sleep at nights."

Juliet opened dismayed eyes. She had an absolute belief in her mother's wisdom. Even the suspicion that the question had better not have been put at all than so late in the day did not occur to her, but she grieved that the tiresome idea should have presented itself to distress her mother.

"It isn't as if it were for always, you see, mother," she said presently. "Of course, there is Uncle Isaac, and his lovely house and garden, and—oh! I forget how

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many thousands of pounds. This is only a makeshift, you see, till Uncle Isaac dies."

"Exactly. And that justifies Clarence in keeping up things in a better style. And you must agitate for it, Juliet. Remember that. Now is your time. If you don't get concessions in the first months of your marriage you will never get them. I positively shall not dare to explain to your father the kind of home it is to which Clarence has taken you."

Juliet knew that this was a figure of speech, merely. There was nothing under the sun Mrs Cummin did not dare so far as Mr Cummin was concerned. Still, she wished to reassure her parent, and to do so could only fall back on her assertion of Clarence's "sweetness."

"Really a thousand times sweeter than when we were engaged," she declared.

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“You said I could not expect my husband to be like my lover, mother ; but you were wrong. Clarence is more my lover a hundred times since we married. He says if he'd lost me when we were engaged he would have been wretched for the rest of his days, but that if he lost me now there wouldn't be any days—it would be the finish!”

She had a changeable face, which sometimes and in some eyes was adorably pretty ; at others, and to other people, just an ordinary girl's face, about which no remark was to be made. As she repeated that foolish speech it was lovely, soft, and glowing, the eyes dreaming, tender, darkened with feeling. Her voice, which her enemies called shrill, was sweet with a trembling awe. Mrs Cummin, who greatly loved her daughter, was pleased with that testimony to Eglamore's

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devotion ; but she was of an eminently practical turn of mind. Such hours of bliss were winged, she knew ; all the more reason to utilise them.

“Speak to Clarence at once about any alteration you wish to have made,” she insisted. “Get another servant in, or, if he prefers it, a page-boy. See that he is not stingy over your housekeeping allowance. I will go into matters with you to-morrow, and will decide how much is the least you should accept. Be steadfast in refusing to have back the old furniture and old pictures into the house. I assure you they are only rubbish. If he tries to persuade you otherwise, don’t listen. Those two pictures, for instance, about which he was so odd at dinner—they may be of his father and mother, if so, his parents were most common-looking people—are absolute daubs. Enough to

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condemn any house they appear in. Since Clarence is so fond of them, hang them in his dressing-room. He can have them all to himself there."

When Juliet left her mother she found that Clarence had not come up to bed. Listening, she heard him moving about in the dining-room, and presently she ran down to him there.

He was standing on a chair in one of the recesses, carefully dusting with his handkerchief the frame of one of his parents' portraits, which he had restored to their original places.

"That you, darling?" he asked without turning round, hearing the rustle of her silk-lined dress. "Look here! Your mother had put these pictures away under the bedstead in the servants' room, and had stood a fender on the top of them. She had! You never saw such a sight.

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There's dozens of things that cost me pounds thick, at one time or another, shoved away under the beds. The maids say they couldn't help themselves, they'd orders to shove them away. Look here! Do you see what your mother has done to this?"

The corner of one of the dingy gilt frames was broken off, and at intervals, along one side and at the top, patches of white showed where the moulding had been injured.

"Isn't it a wicked shame?" Clarence demanded. "Look here, Juliet. This is where the foot of the fender went."

Just where the sleek black hair, arranged in a chignon, of the late Mrs Eglamore was painted was a deep depression in the canvas and a jagged tear.

"Isn't it a ghastly shame?" Eglamore asked, sure of his wife's sympathy.

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But Juliet grew pale as she contemplated her husband's deed. Not once in her life had she ventured to maintain her own opinion against her mother's. On those not infrequent occasions when her father attempted to do so the consequences were disastrous.

"How could you!" she cried in frightened dismay. "Oh, Clarence, what have you done! What will poor mother say?"

"Say?" he repeated. He came down from the chair, and set it heavily back against the wall. "What should your mother say except to apologise to me for the mischief she has done?"

"Apologise! Mother! How can you be so absurd?" she cried. "Oh, Clarence! You might have left cousin Anna's pictures there for a little time—what harm could they do you?—till poor mother was gone, at anyrate."

THE LITTLE RIFT

"And left my father and mother under the servants' bed?" Clarence inquired with a portentous quiet.

Juliet stood before them in turn and looked in silence at the desecrated portraits. That of Clarence's father had also suffered. The frame was badly chipped, although in a less degree. A big dent in the canvas in the region of Mr Eglamore senior's coat collar showed where the foot of the fender, having penetrated the picture above it, had rested. The portraits had evidently been stowed away back to back.

Of the fact that the pictures were well painted Juliet was unaware. Her mother had said they were common daubs. She did not doubt that they were. They did not certainly contribute to the appearance of the dining-room—the only good-sized room in the house, and appropriately

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furnished—as Cousin Anna’s masterpieces had done. As she stood before them Juliet remembered her mother’s exhortation. Now was her time. She must begin as she meant to go on. Mrs Cummin’s wisdom was ever the wisdom of her daughter. She seized on her courage with both hands.

“I think these portraits will have to be put away again,” she said.

The tone was not her own, but one her mother would approve. He looked at her with surprised attention.

“Do you?” he asked.

“Yes. It is only due to poor mother, who has been so kind, leaving—leaving father, and everything, for a whole week, and working to get things nice for us as she never—never has to work at home; standing on chairs and things to hang up pictures—and no wardrobe, only *hooks*,

THE LITTLE RIFT

in her nasty, horrible little bedroom,
and——”

“Well?”

She had lost her breath, and had to pause; she drew herself up, and went on again. “It is only due to mother, Clarence; that you put Cousin Anna’s pictures back where mother wished them to be, and put these out of the way; at any-rate while mother is here. Send them to be regilded and done up.”

He had never heard that tone from her before, and he gazed at her in astonishment.

She was so young. On her round cheek, her softly moulded chin, beneath her sweet eyes, lay still the dewy bloom of very childhood. Her youthful softness was a delight to him, her childish innocence and faith in him had more than once brought tears to his eyes. Her

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ungrudging yielding of herself, her life, her opinions to him, while wholly satisfying his masculine superiority, had kept him kneeling humbly at her feet.

Here was a change, and an unwelcome one.

That Mrs Cummin was a domineering, arrogant, self-willed woman he had been made amply aware. While he had visited at their house he had amused himself, at times, in devising plans by which he would have known, in the place of Juliet's father, how to be even with her. And this, while perceiving that it was perhaps to her tyrannic rule he owed the charming docility of her daughter. That his wife would not always with him be equally docile, that she would not be able in a moment to cast off the autocratic sway of her mother, had not as yet occurred to Clarence Eglamore.

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He looked at the girl, therefore, in astonishment now, and found himself, for the moment, incapable of doing more than pronouncing her name.

"Juliet?" he said, softly interrogative.

She gained courage, seeing him so tame. Her mother would praise her to-morrow when she found how boldly she had comported herself. "Yes; that will be best—have them regilded," she said. She took up one of the discarded works of art, and held it to him. "Put these back now, at once, will you?" she requested with that new, absurd note of authority.

"My dearest child, no," he said.

He took the picture from her, and set it again with its face to the wall. He laid a hand upon her shoulder heavily, emphasising who and what he was. With his other hand he held her face turned up to him.

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"Who has been teaching you?" he asked. "Juliet, that's the kind of thing your mother would make your father do. I'm not your father, darling."

The tears rushed to her eyes. "Dear, kind father!" she said with a sob.

"And you, thank God, are not your mother."

"But you needn't—needn't, directly we are married, be unkind about my dear father and mother, Clarence."

"You may be quite sure that I will not."

"Then——" She turned eloquently to the picture, beseeching him with her tear-wet eyes.

"Certainly not. Once and for all time, that matter's settled," he said. And, mercifully ignorant in his self-confidence of how very far that statement was from being a fact, he led her to the door of

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the room, and told her to go upstairs and get to bed.

Not even for that night, as he found later, was the matter settled. Juliet went slowly upstairs, sad with the consciousness that she had miserably failed to adjust a situation which for her was fraught with terrors. It was her husband's misfortune and hers that he could neither heartily sympathise with his wife's love for her mother, nor even believe in the reality of her fear of her. The notion that Mrs Cummin's wrath, now that Juliet was safely under his roof, could indeed be a matter of dread did not enter his head. That the thought of her mother's probable anger and sorrow should have the power to turn her light-heartedness into a miserable foreboding, destroying all her happiness on her first night in her new home, he never suspected.

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So often she had lived under that dark cloud of dread at home. So often she had been frightened by her mother's rage, and unhappy because of her father's sadness. In her childhood it had seemed to Juliet that the very heavens frowned and grew dark when Mrs Cummin was offended. This, when she had herself all unwittingly been the cause of offence, or when more often the sinner had been her father. How infinitely, infinitely worse would be the position of affairs if her husband should become the object of her poor mother's displeasure!

She was too anxious to go to bed. She must make one more attempt to avert the mischief she saw to be preparing. When she heard her husband's step at last on the stair, and he entered his dressing-room, she opened the door between the two rooms, and stood in the

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doorway beseeching him with her appealing eyes. She had put on the white dressing-gown, which, to her tall slightness, was perhaps its most becoming garb; her head drooped with its distress; all her soft brown hair fell heavily upon her shoulders.

"Not in bed?" he said. He caressed her while he chided her. "You are never to wait up for me, but to go to bed like a good child when I send you there."

"I will," she said, and clung to him. "Clarence, you were a little tiny wee bit cross to me just now, weren't you? I couldn't go to bed while you were cross."

"I was not cross one atom!" he declared. "How could I, sweet, be cross to you?"

"You do love me just as much as you did yesterday, don't you, Clarence?"

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"Every, every scrap as much."

"But love, you know, can't stand still," she told him, wisely. "To be really, really loving as loving, and sweet as sweet, you must love me a little more each day."

"I do, sweetest! I swear I do."

"Then you can't deny me one little, little favour, Clarence! Just one teeny, insignificant, baby thing I want you to do?"

She had wheedled him in that way to buy her marzipan once or twice, or to give her sixpence for a beggar. "To the half of my kingdom," he said with low-voiced fervour, but smiling and without a misgiving. He cleared her face with both hands of her shadowing hair, and looked into her eyes, which were very serious.

"Will you, dear Clarence, because I

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love you so, and because I wish it so much, go down again and hang up those pictures of Cousin Anna's where poor mother had put them?"

He ceased to smile. "And put my father and mother under the servants' bed again, I suppose? And the fender on the top of them? I certainly will not do that," he said, and turned away from her, and pulled off his coat.

"I never change my mind about a thing it's once made up on, my dear," he said, as she still miserably lingered. "Run away and get into bed."

CHAPTER III

FAIR LAUGHS THE MORN

IN The Cottage, as the Eglamores' tiny home was called, was a third room; and in that, to Juliet's intense relief, rather than in the dining-room dominated by the two ominous portraits, breakfast was laid.

The room was at the back of the house, and looked out upon a large strip of garden, narrow, but stretching far, and separated from the meadow on either side by hedges of lilac. The room had a French window, whose door stood open invitingly to the box-edged gravel path which led, between borders bright with wall-flower, tulip, forget-me-not, polyanthus, to the orchard at the end of the

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walk, blushing pink through its white robe like a bride.

For the month of the Eglamores' homecoming was the month of May, and the wide country around, encroaching so delightfully on the little town of Hale, had put on its most smiling face to give them welcome.

The sun was shining, the air was full of sweetest scents. Juliet, whose moods were as changeable as the forms of the fleecy cloudlets which chased each other across the blue of the sky, felt that all was well with the world. Her heart sang as happily as the thrushes in the lilac bushes at the back of the flower borders. There had been a little gloom in her bearing, a touch of a new reserve in her demeanour towards her husband since last night. The flowers, the sunshine, the birds' song, the breakfast-table in the

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bright little room, had dissipated these. Eglamore found her, a slim, white-robed figure, as pure-looking and as graceful as a new, strange queen of flowers, moving among the other flowers in the sunshine. She had a buttonhole of forget-me-nots hardly bluer than her eyes to fix in his coat, a knot of them was stuck in the bosom of her own frock, a small posy of them, backed by some velvety, blue-black pansies, was ready for her mother's plate.

He drew her, his arm about her shoulders, back into the little room.

"Isn't this *sweet*?" she asked of him, making use of the familiar phrase which expressed all her girlish raptures.

He threw eyes of affection round the book-lined walls of the tiny room which had been his particular sanctum. "It is no bigger than a nest," he said, pleased but deprecating.

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"And I shall be as happy in it as a bird! I would not have it an inch bigger."

Her mother was in her place at table. Her mother was all smiles. Ah, if while Mrs Cummin stayed it were possible to prevent her entering the dining-room and discovering the daring restoration of the pictures! If only that were possible!

With this end in view Juliet exaggerated her liking for the little morning-room. "I like it a thousand times better than the dining-room," she artfully said. "It is so much more cosy. No, Clarence, I don't mind a bit—really!—having the hind legs of my chair in the fireplace. And if there isn't room for the servant to get between mother and the wall, so much the better! We needn't have the servant in. I love to have the door standing wide to that sweet little garden, and to see you, you dear old thing, sitting

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"Who has been teaching you?" he asked. "Juliet, that's the kind of thing your mother would make your father do. I'm not your father, darling."

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"But, presumably you will not wish your guests to think — when you have got things decent enough about you to have guests — that your wife has not been accustomed to have such things properly done?"

"Of course, Harriet must be taught, you silly boy," Juliet hastened to interpose. "The best time to teach her is while mother is here. Only, I do so wish she could be taught in this room."

Her husband saw her clouded face, and his lover's desire to pet and humour his wife got the better of his wise resolve to propitiate her arbitrary mother. "Poor Baby! It is only a baby!" he said, laughing at her. "It shall have its own way."

He got up, and edged round the table, all but filling the little space, and stood in the fireplace behind her chair, and

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turned up her face to him. On all the earth, to his thinking, was no other face so adorable: the round, fair cheeks with their beauty of finish, to be seen only in early youth, their dewy bloom; the small features—not in other people's eyes much of features, not classic at all, but upturned; the definite, delicate line of the brown eyebrows; the upward curve of the brown lashes; the frame of the loosely dressed brown hair.

Eglamore's close-set lips widened into a smile; his eyes looked love upon the lids which fluttered beneath his gaze but would not lift themselves. "I also wish for lunch in here," he announced. "Harriet's education must wait."

Mrs Cummin moved impatiently in her chair, her silk lining rustled. "Have it your own way—of course," she said. "Your house is your own, Clarence.

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Only, if my advice is not to be taken, and my plans to be thrust on one side, I had better go back at once to Birmingham. There I can be of use; here, Juliet evidently does not want me."

Juliet twisted her face from her husband's hands and gave an affrighted glance at her parent. "I do want you," she said. "Oh, mother, you know I want you, dreadfully. I don't know how to do a single thing. I have told you, Clarence, what an ignoramus I am. Of course, it is mother who must teach Harriet. If she—she thumped the savoury before me I dare not tell her not to do it. And if she put a—a potato on my plate with her fingers I give you fair warning I should eat it meekly. You must do everything, mother. For thousands and thousands of pounds I would not have you go away."

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"Then we shall begin as we mean to go on, and have lunch in the dining-room," Mrs Cummin said.

But for the prospect of that lunch in view of the dreaded portraits, what a blissful morning that would have been for Juliet! She and her mother spent it in her bedroom, unpacking the clothes she had had with her on her honeymoon, looking over them, putting them away. This, with long pauses for talk, sitting on the floor, kneeling by wardrobe or travelling trunk, as some interesting incident of their separation was recalled by either lady and must be at that moment related.

The Tolworths were going to Florence. Had not Juliet been told? Positively! The mother and her three daughters. Picture them there! The fact was, the

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girls had been so filled with jealousy by the marriage of Juliet, who was younger than any of them, that their mother had been compelled to promise them Florence as compensation.

Juliet, her legs tucked up under her, sat on the floor and panted with interest. The day before Mrs Cummin had left home the Tolworths had called and sent messages to Juliet. "Be sure to tell her about Florence, they had said, and ask her if she does not envy us."

"Tell them No," Juliet said steadily. "Tell them I envy no single person upon earth." She gripped tightly in her hand the shoe of that foot which stuck out sideways beyond her skirt, and looked at the carpet before her, for a minute wondering what it would be like to have only the Tolworths' outlook: to have Florence only before her and no Clarence. "I

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should like them to meet someone in Florence to marry them all—three some-ones—so that they are all happy, mother,” she said. “Did you know that Clarence doesn’t admire them at all, although they are so pretty? He only likes brown-haired girls, he says——”

“And only one of them, I should hope!” Mrs Cummin cried. “My dear! Look at this great spot on the flounce of your *crêpe de Chine*.”

Juliet felt responsible still to her mother for any carelessness over her clothes. “Clarence jogged my arm to look at some one just when I was going to drink my coffee,” she explained. “He was so awfully sorry and sweet. He loves me best of all in that *crêpe de Chine*, mother. He vowed, whatever it cost, as soon as it was spoilt he would get me another.”

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"He'd better see about it, then. It's spoilt now."

"Isn't it wonderful, mother? Often as Clarence had looked at me he had never discovered what a peculiar shade of blue my eyes were till I wore that dress."

Mrs Cummin's wrath was diverted. She glanced aside from the stained flounce to the eyes in question. Juliet did not get the scolding she expected. Certainly, it was very nice to be married.

While they brushed the mud acquired in London yesterday from the hem of her grey cloth travelling dress they discussed a certain distant connection of Clarence's, called Susy Plain. She called herself his cousin, and had been the only representative of the town of Hale at the wedding.

"I'm so glad you had her, mother. She must have made it nice for you after I was gone. (It's escaped the white

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piping—really, mother, look! My hands were full of carnations Clarence got me in Regent Street, I couldn't possibly hold it up.) Clarence says she is an awfully good sort—a kind of person you can really talk to, he says, without being bothered. No nonsense about her. He says that of girls, I *think*, who have not made him make love to them. Such a lot of girls really make men, you know—not Clarence, he says, but other men; only, Clarence doesn't like to see it. He says men can't help themselves, poor things, if girls won't leave them alone. (It's only the tiniest speck on the white, mother, really. If you brush very hard——) And did you really like her very much, mother?"

Yes. Mrs Cummin, who was by no means an incensorious person, had nothing but good to say of Susy Plain. She had

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been, it appeared, much impressed by the grandeur of Marchmont (Marchmont was the name of the Cummins' fine house at Edgbaston, Birmingham). She had been also a little anxious as to how the Eglamore humble dwelling might strike Juliet in comparison with that mansion.

"She'll be much relieved to find you've made up your mind to like it," the mother said.

As if Juliet could do otherwise! Clarence had thought of every single thing in it to please her, she declared. He'd remembered her least little tiniest wish. There wasn't even a doormat in the place that he had not thought of her when he chose it. Juliet knew because he'd said so. "You know how I love grandfathers' clocks, mother? I just happened one day to say I loved them ;

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and now look—grandfathers' clocks; one in the hall and one on the landing. *Two* of them! Did you see, mother?"

"And heard! One keeps me awake with its ticking every night."

"Poor, dear mother! But when Clarence has been so sweet, shouldn't I be an ungrateful wretch not to like the place? Of course I like it!"

"All the same, get out of it as soon as possible. To live in such a house gives you no standing in the town. I said so to Susy Plain only yesterday."

"And what did Susy say?"

"She agreed, of course. She said she wouldn't be mewed up in such a poky hole for anything. You see, if Clarence is really so much in love as he says, he'll do anything, Juliet."

Juliet sighed as, having brushed away every speck of mud, she got up and shook

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the grey cloth skirt with white pipings.
"He's certainly very much in love, dear old boy," she said.

"Then now's your time," insisted Mrs Cummin.

CHAPTER IV

THE CLASH OF WILLS

"**I** THOUGHT I asked you always to lay my place on this side of the table?" Mrs Cummin said to Harriet as they were all about to sit down to lunch.

Harriet assumed an aggrieved look. "'M, so I did set you there, 'm. I laid your knives and forks and your glasses and your serverette where you told me to yesterday, 'm ; and——"

"And I moved them," Juliet hastened to admit. "I thought you'd be more safely out of the draught there, mother. Harriet shall remember to put you against the door to-morrow, if you really like it

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best. But there's quite a strong draught to-day. Really!'

Sufficient for the day was the evil of it. Let her sit with her back to the portraits for this one meal!

But even in such a small matter as her place at table it was a difficult matter to switch Mrs Cummin off a course determined on. Juliet might perjure herself, and feel a strong draught blowing on that still day through the closed door, but Harriet had to replace the knives and forks and set the chair in the originally indicated spot all the same.

Instantly, as Mrs Cummin took her place, she lifted her eyes to the opposite wall, and they fell on the reinstated portraits.

Juliet was nervously making some remark to her husband, who had been away at his office all the morning. Her voice

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wavered, almost died away, went on again with a desperate courage. She held her husband's gaze with her frightened eyes, but she knew, for all that, the exact moment in which the discovery was made. Had it been greeted with the loud ha! ha! of the war-horse scenting the battle, the sound would not have been to her ears more ominous than the silence in which Mrs Cummin, perceiving the portraits, looked away in an ill-boding stillness where even her frock had ceased to rustle.

Without daring to move her eyes from her husband's face, Juliet was aware her mother was silently waving away the lamb rissole which Harriet was offering her. Cold beef was the alternative; when that too was declined Juliet's heart was like lead within her.

"Nothing?" Clarence demanded of his

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mother-in-law, the carvers poised in his hands, his eyebrows raised.

"Thank you—nothing," Mrs Cummin replied with a crushing finality.

Juliet's hands shook as she went through the pantomime of her own lunch. If Harriet had not been watchfully standing by it is more than probable that she would have broken down and cried over the rissole she was pretending to eat.

"Why, what have you two been doing?" Eglamore asked. "You have been browsing on those sweets you dragged out of me yesterday, haven't you, Juliet? Now, look here. You sha'n't ruin your teeth and your digestion and your appetite. You hand over that rubbish after lunch, and I'll lock it up, and allow you two lollipops at a time when you're good, and two for your mother."

He turned to the last-named lady as he

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made that playful threat and got his first inkling that Mrs Cummin was "on her hind legs," as he called it disrespectfully to himself. The deepened complexion, the glitter of the eyes fixed rigidly before her, the tightened mouth, told him as much. He looked at his wife, who, with an expression of frightened misery in her eyes, cast an explanatory glance upon the portraits in the niches.

"That is it?" Clarence said to himself. He cut himself another slice of cold beef, and helped himself lavishly to salad; then, suppressing an inclination to laugh, he began to talk with unusual glibness to his wife.

He told how his senior partner, his Uncle Isaac, and the clerks had welcomed him back to the office. How some of the latter had grown grey in his uncle's service, and all had been there when he

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himself had joined, a boy just through his Articles. How champagne had been drunk and kind things said.

"We must have them all up to something; Juliet. And you must win all their hearts at a swoop; and there shall be more champagne. One doesn't get married every day, Mrs Cummin."

Mrs Cummin neither unfixed her stare nor unscrewed her mouth.

Clarence went on, undaunted. Uncle Isaac had asked if he might make his call after office hours, and had wanted his nephew to name an early day when he would take his wife to dine at Willowhurst, Uncle Isaac's home. This person and that had looked in, to shake hands and to wish Clarence and his wife luck.

"Everyone is what you'd call 'sweet,' and wants to be very friendly," he finished.

Juliet was miserably indifferent, given

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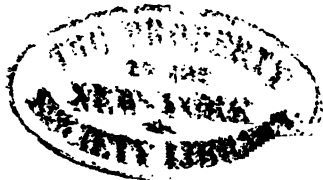
over for the time to the apprehension of the trouble ahead. "I don't know who they are—I don't want to know—I don't care," she limply said.

"You know Susy, don't you? She's coming this afternoon to see you. She saw me above the office blind and tapped at the window and asked if she might. She is a good old fellow, Susy is! I was glad to see her smiling old face again."

"I didn't know she was an old man. I thought she was a girl," Juliet said, with an attempt at a laugh.

"A girl of sorts," Clarence said. And then the pudding came in, and this too—oh, horror! oh, despair!—Mrs Cummin refused. She refused the cream cheese and watercress—everything!

"There's *something* ain't to the old girl's liking, you bet," Harriet warned cook over their own meal. "Tain't me.



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I took care she shouldn't have a chance to pick no holes the fust day as the master come back. 'Tis you, Gertie. The sparrow-grass weren't laid straight i' th' dish, or somethin' had let the water in, bet your life."

"Wait till she tell me of it!" cook cried with defiance. "I ain't agoin' to have two missises in one house, nayther; and so I'll up and tell her as soon as look at her."

In the dining-room, meanwhile, Harriet having finally withdrawn, Mrs Cummin, whose temper had not improved by starvation, addressed herself to Clarence.

"I wish to know, if you have a timetable handy, by what train I can return to Birmingham," she said.

"You don't want to know about the trains to-day, surely, Mrs Cummin?"

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"I am leaving to-day," she announced with an inauspicious calm.

Juliet began to cry. "No, mother! Oh, mother!" she sobbed.

"I thought you would have stopped with us for at least a week," Clarence politely protested.

"I do not stay in a house where I find my services publicly slighted"—her voice shook now with the intensity of her wrath—"and myself—myself—insulted."

Clarence had been preparing to light the cigarette he allowed himself after the midday meal. He paused, the match unlit in his hand, the look of amusement it had held through lunch gone from his face, and all the softness from his eyes, and looked at his mother-in-law.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

She was by no means the typical mother-in-law, fat and elderly and ridicu-

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lous, as that much-abused person is popularly supposed to be, and sometimes is not. She was small and slight and youthful-looking—carefully so. Her face was well-featured, after the sharply aquiline model, her hair was beautifully dressed. She had been of the age of twenty-eight when Juliet, who was now twenty, had been born, and people who wished to flatter the rich merchant's wife—and there were many who did—said she looked like Juliet's sister. There were traces of temper about the eyes and brow, of stubbornness about the mouth and jaw. Her husband had sometimes called her to himself a fiend. No one had called her a coward.

Her small, close-set eyes met Clarence's unflinchingly.

"You surely cannot know what you are saying! Who has insulted

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you? What do you mean?" he repeated.

"Need you ask?" the mother-in-law cried. She jerked a hand towards the offending portraits. "To defy my wishes, to undo my plans, to belittle me in the sight of your own servants on the first day of your return! In doing this you have insulted me."

She got up from the table, and stood, the tips of her fingers touching the cloth, looking at Eglamore, seated at the head of it, with something of that air of unconquerable enmity wherewith he had seen her occasionally regard her husband. She threw her head farther back, and looked over her cheeks at him with lowered lids. When she had heard the phrase "offended queen" it was so that she had pictured outraged Majesty's pose.

"I consider myself insulted," she said.

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"Even from my daughter's husband I will not submit to insult."

Clarence struck the match, lit the cigarette, flung the match into the fireplace. "Absurd!" he said, and put the cigarette between his lips.

His wife was looking at him with agonised face, leaning forward, the fingers of her slight hands pulling upon each other across her breast crushed against the table. In the dreadful quarrels between father and mother never had she interfered. She was afraid to interfere now; yet how often had Clarence, in the past delightful weeks, pledged himself to do anything she might demand of him for her sake!

"Clarence!" she breathed imploringly.

He looked at her with no softening in his eyes and looked away again.

"To call me, while I am defenceless be-

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neath your roof, 'absurd,' is not to lessen the insult," Mrs Cummin pronounced.

"What else can I call it? Any sane person would call it so."

Clarence stopped as his wife again called upon his name. "What is it that you want me to say?" He waited, and smoked his cigarette for a moment. His lower lip protruded upon it, the cigarette pointing upward, his eyes on Juliet's pleading face. Then he laughed, and turned to Mrs Cummin.

"I haven't any heroics at command, I fear," he said slowly; "but anything that I can do or say to make you feel—happier, Mrs Cummin—I am ready to say or do—in reason."

"Clarence!" Juliet cried again. She sprang from her place and rushed round to her husband and sat on his knee and folded her arms about his neck. "You

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are a darling! I love you!" she whispered.

Mrs Cummin already tasted triumph. "I only ask you to do what the merest decency demands," she said with an air of waiting with dignified calm the result.

Clarence, passively accepting his wife's caresses, and holding his cigarette clear of her hair, contented himself with looking his question with cold eyes.

Mrs Cummin raised a hand and pointed to the chipped frames, the damaged canvases of the portraits desecrating the shallow recesses on either side of the fireplace, where Cousin Anna's pictures, in all the glory of new gilding and new paint, had hung.

Her son-in-law turned a momentary gaze and turned back, while Juliet squeezed his throat tighter in her embrace, and uttered a more imploring "Clarence!"

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"I gather," he said slowly, with the careful precision of speech he usually reserved for his clients, "that the replacing the portraits of my father and mother in the position they originally occupied has caused you annoyance?"

Mrs Cummin, still gazing at him over her cheeks beneath lowered lids, admitted the inference in silence.

"I concede"—here he laid down the half-burnt cigarette on the side of his plate — "that, thanks to their sojourn under the servants' bed and beneath the foot of the dining-room fender, they no longer have an exactly decorative effect. I'm sorry they don't do the house so much credit as the masterpieces of Juliet's Cousin Anna did in their stead ; and that in spite of their present defective condition I have felt compelled to replace them. For any annoyance this action has caused

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you I am sorry, of course, and I beg to apologise."

For recompense a rapturously whispered "Darling!" was in his ear, a tightening of Juliet's arm about his neck.

Mrs Cummin drew in a breath of gratification. She was relieved, but by no means surprised. She had been the champion of too many lists, entering them always without one fear of defeat. She was not, however, as yet satisfied.

"I accept your apology, Clarence," she said. (Ah, the load off Juliet's heart! She sat upright on her husband's knee. The idea of having the rissoles brought back, and of begging her mother to eat them crossed her mind. But Mrs Cummin went relentlessly on, and again the lord of Juliet's bosom sat heavily upon his throne.) "Juliet will be as relieved as I shall be to have these shabby old

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portraits out of the way, and the pictures specially painted by Cousin Anna for your wedding appropriately hung as I had arranged."

"No!" Clarence said; he put his wife gently from his knee and got up. "No," he repeated; "I must request you, Mrs Cummin, to leave the portraits of my father and mother where I have hung them."

He received no answer but the glare of his adversary's eye. He met it steadily for a minute, then turned away, and went with high demeanour from the room.

At the door he looked back and called to Juliet. "I want you, dear," he said.

But Juliet knew her place better than to follow. Of her own accord she would have chosen any society on earth for the next quarter of an hour rather than her mother's company. But, for all her

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life, her will had been her mother's will.
To it she was a slave still.

As for Eglamore, he had made his ultimatum. Discretion, he knew by the study of the law, to be the better, not to say the cheaper, part of valour, and he deemed it desirable to leave the house without re-encounter. Yet, the stupendous separation of two and a half hours before them, how could he part from his wife without farewell?

In his dressing - room he lingered ingeniously over washing his hands, stood for minutes before the looking-glass brushing his already unruffled hair. "Poor Cummin!" he said to himself many times. "Heavens! to be married to such a woman!"

There was so little of Juliet, his girlish, yielding Juliet, in her—a fact he had always rapturously recognised—that the

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circumstance of her being his wife's mother did not at all soften him towards his guest. She was his guest, she had shown him hospitality. Juliet had a habit of affection for her, she was the wife of Juliet's unhappy father—these were her claims on his consideration ; for these reasons he had made his apology, although the doing it had gone against the grain and ruffled him to remember.

What an awful woman! To be tied to her for life! Poor Cummin! Poor Cummin, with the strong and tender heart, and the beaten look in his eyes!

"I'm off in two minutes, darling," he called as he put on his hat outside the dining-room door.

He went into the garden and walked between the long flower borders, up and down the straight path which had been fresh gravelled in honour of Juliet. When,

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still, she did not come he went round to the dining-room window which was in the front of the house and looked within. Having looked he re-entered the house, and, crossing the little hall, threw open the dining-room door.

Juliet was crouching upon the floor, her arms flung out upon the seat of a chair, her head flung upon her arms. "Mother is going, Clarence," she sobbed. "She is going away at once, Clarence." Mrs Cummin did not speak, but the poise of her head, the pressure of her lips, the angry shaking of her hands, shouted unmistakably : "At once !"

Her face was pale, her features screwed with the intensity of her determination ; there was a glint of fury in her eyes. Before her on the table was a collection of odds and ends ; some lacework Clarence remembered often to have seen in her

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hands, and a satin bag clasped with silver which had been familiar to him at Marchmont, a writing-case, a novel, with the ticket of a Birmingham library pasted on the cover. Eglamore knew at a glance she had been going from room to room making a collection of her belongings. He looked at her with a heavy seriousness. "I am sorry ; but you must of course please yourself, Mrs Cummin," he said. "Are you not coming to say good-bye, Juliet?" he asked, turning to his wife.

Juliet leapt up and flew upon him, sobbing, holding tightly to his coat. "Oh, Clarence! Don't let her!" she cried. "Don't let mother leave us so! It will break my heart. It will! It will!"

"My dear child, I can't control your mother."

"But may I? Clarence, may I—do say I may—take the horrible portraits down?"

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She will stay if I do—she has said so. You will stay if I do, mother? Tell him—oh, do tell Clarence so.”

“Hush! Nonsense!” he said, short and sharp.

She was to hear it often in the future, but that was the first time (and she always remembered it) she had suffered that tone from him. “Now, listen, Juliet; listen, and try to bear it in mind. The last word I intend to say about those pictures I have already spoken. Let that be the finish. I am going now. Good-bye, darling.”

But Juliet pushed him away when he would have kissed her, and went sobbing back to her place on the floor, and hid her face in the seat of the chair again.

“All for the sake of a pair of hideous, ugly, common, old *beastly* portraits!” she chokingly cried.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH THE SAVOURY WAS LATE

LATE as he was on that afternoon (and he was a man of a punctual habit) Clarence Eglamore did not go at once to his office. He walked quickly past the tall, narrow house where the old-established firm, whose junior partner he was, carried on their profession of solicitors. A few hundred feet farther on, and the offices, shops, private houses ceased, and the High Street lost itself in the Church Road, a pleasant region of widely detached villas, large and small; of grass-bordered paths and shadowing trees. Here the houses stood in spacious gardens amid old May-trees, pink chestnuts, laburnums,

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copper beeches. Into the gate of one of the largest of these, whose lawns had been kept rolled and neat for generations, in whose beautifully cared for borders—long and long before herbaceous borders had become fashionable — hollyhock, peony, tree-lupin, delphiniums, and phloxes, red and white, had come up, year after year, Eglamore turned.

“Susy!” he called; and a lady who had been stooping, scissors in hand, cutting dead tulips from a round bed in the centre of the carriage - drive before the house, lifted her head.

She was a plump young woman of ample proportions, whose neat attire was hidden for the moment in a voluminous holland pinafore; who looked at the world through a pair of glasses perched on a broad and upturned nose; who smiled at it with a wide mouth and a long upper lip; who

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had the kind of countenance people call "open" and associate with good nature. She came forward briskly to greet her visitor.

"Well, I call this decent of you to come so soon!" she cried, and pulled off her stiff gardening glove and seized the young man's hand.

"I didn't come for politeness—just because I want you," he hastened to explain. "You know Mrs Cummin, Susy?"

She looked at him and nodded. The sun was on her glasses; he could not see the expression of her eyes.

"Susy, she is a fearful woman!"

Susy looked away and laughed aloud. "I wouldn't be Mr Cummin for nuts!" she said. "I was only there a week, but—my word!"

He stopped her. "I know. If you and she were strangers I wouldn't say

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a word. But everything's safe with you, Susy; and—the fat's in the fire at home this afternoon."

"Already?" Susy inquired, with no abatement of her cheerfulness. "She's jumping on Juliet, I suppose?"

"Not so bad as that. I'm the victim. And—she's going away."

"Well I never! And you and Juliet only home last night! How you do go it, old man! What have you all been up to?"

He told her the small history. She stood and listened, sometimes smiling to herself behind her glasses, sometimes smiling openly from ear to ear.

"And what is it you want me to do?" she asked, in her hearty, good-comrade tone, when the recital was over.

"I hardly know," he admitted. "But you're such a good sort, Susy, and poor

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little Juliet's upset, and you're going down there ; cheer her up, will you, and be good to her, and do what you can with her mad old mother. Smooth things over—make her stop, if you can. Don't let's have a ridiculous scandal to begin with ; I leave it to you. You'll know how to manage. I must be off. I'm fifteen minutes late for an appointment as it is. Do your best, Susy."

He got through that speech moving away, she following him, his watch in his hand. At the gate he stopped. "Don't think me mad for rushing in like this and rushing away," he said. "Only, I couldn't stop with poor little Juliet myself, and I want someone to be good to her. And I've always come to you, Susy, haven't I?"

She nodded and laughed. "You always have."

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"When I've anything to get off my chest I suppose I shall still. I'm off now. Good-bye, Susy."

"Ta-ta, Clarence."

He stopped when he had started running along the road and called to her over the beautifully kept double hedge which bounded the Plains' garden. "I won't have the portraits removed, remember. Anything but that, Susy."

"Right you are!" she called back to him. "I wouldn't if I were you."

Susy, broadly smiling, walked through the garden again, and in through the open window to the morning-room of Cuckoo Hall, as the Plains' house was called, where her mother sat at work.

"Such a lark!" the daughter cried. That she permitted herself occasional vulgarities of speech had helped in some unexplained way to establish among

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charitably disposed people her character for good nature. "You know Mrs Cummin? There's been a row all round at Clarence's place. She's taking herself off this afternoon."

Then, with much enjoyment of the humour of the situation, she told the tale, which lost nothing in the telling. She pulled off her holland pinafore and cast from her her gardening accoutrements. "He wants me to smooth things over for him. I may as well go and see about it at once, I suppose."

"Yes, go, and get back and let's hear all about it," the mother said. She was a fat and comfortable-looking woman, wearing a white silk shawl over her shoulders, and, although her husband had been dead ten years, a widow's cap. Put thirty years on to Susy's thirty-five and it could be seen Miss Plain would

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be the living, comfortable image of her comfortable mother.

"What a way to begin!" Mrs Plain cried. She laughed her daughter's laugh. It disclosed in her case a perfect set of false teeth. The elder lady had the advantage there, for Susy's teeth were large and irregular, and a good many of them stopped. "How everyone will talk!"

Susy lifted her broad shoulders. "I'm not a bit surprised. I told you about the woman in her own house. She's a tyrant, and the rest of them slaves. Mr Cummin doesn't call his soul his own; the girl is as soft as pudding. I thought she'd find out she'd caught a Tartar when she caught Clarence. There'll be the deuce to pay at The Cottage, you'll see."

When Susy, dressed for her visit, appeared before her mother again, Mrs

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Plain, looking at her daughter over her spectacles, intensely approved the tight-fitting, fawn-coloured coat and skirt adorned with green strappings, in which the young lady's stout form was enclosed, the high-crowned hat of green, trimmed with a fawn ribbon and a white wing. She was working her brown, thick fingers into a new pair of white kid gloves.

"I don't envy Juliet Eglamore overmuch, mother," she said.

There had been quite a number of people in Hale interested to hear that announcement which Susy was rather fond of making. Among them were those who put their own construction on it, suspecting that for all Miss Plain's good nature, high spirits, cheerful disposition, she did in her heart very greatly envy Clarence Eglamore's young wife.

"Clarence is a good fellow enough,

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with people who know how to manage him ; but although she's so proud of her bargain, Juliet hasn't caught exactly an angel, and so she'll find out. You mark my words."

"We shall see," Mrs Plain said, busy over her white wool and her crotchet needle. She had had her plans with regard to Clarence too, and they had "gone agley"; but she was a person of a cheerful frame of mind and a short memory, and she bore no grudge.

"I shall stand by Clarence, of course. When he told me of his engagement I promised him I would. 'Make your mind easy; I'll never chuck you up,' I said. So, you see, he's come to me. And I've been thinking if Mrs Cummin persists in leaving The Cottage we'd better take her in here, mother. If people want to know the reason we can

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tell them they hadn't room for her frocks at Clarence's. We might add he hasn't been able to afford to get a wardrobe."

"Well, there's seven here," Mrs Plain said, with a complacent chuckle. "And it'll take her all her time to quarrel with you and me, Susy. Yes. Let her come, if you like."

In the end that was how it was arranged. Mrs Cummin, being tearfully implored to do so by Juliet, and perceiving that in that way alone she could at once maintain her dignity and delay the separation from her daughter, graciously accepted the Plains' invitation.

"It'll save a lot of talk," Susy said sensibly.

She was indeed a delightfully sensible, matter-of-fact person, and withal, so very good-natured. She talked over the inconveniences of hall, of dining- and drawing-

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rooms to which Mrs Cummin for the fifth time called her attention ; she laughed at the tiny dimensions of the morning-room. She listened once more to the argument in favour of a third servant, and agreed to the impossibility of two maids any longer doing the work of the house ; that is, if Harriet were to be dressed in time to answer the door bell in the afternoon.

“ If she cannot do this—if she is still in her print frock—who, I should like to ask you, is to admit Juliet’s callers ? ” Mrs Cummin unanswerably demanded. “ And I suppose, even in such an out-of-the-way hole as this, Juliet will have callers ? ”

“ She’ll have exactly twenty-five,” Susy said, who was an authority on the social capacity of Hale.

“ Then, is Juliet expected to open her own door to those twenty-five, may I ask ? ”

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Susy laughed. "Clarence will have to get in a footman," she suggested.

"It is to that Juliet has been accustomed at home," Mrs Cummin, who never knew when she was being laughed at, reminded the visitor.

"The twenty-five may ring and ring! I'll never say 'Come in,'" Juliet declared. She had wept on this first afternoon of her new life till she could weep no more, and was now lying back languidly in her chair with a headache.

Before Susy left, promising to send the carriage for the outraged lady and her luggage, she was taken into the dining-room by Mrs Cummin, who pointed to the portraits on the walls.

"These pretty objects," she explained, restrainedly bitter, "are the cause of the unpleasantness. For their sakes I am banished from my only daughter's house.

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What do you think of them? Do you blame me for putting them out of the way? Is it possible that any sane person, accustomed to decent surroundings, could consider them ornamental?"

Susy stood, her hands on her substantial hips, her feet wide planted as was her favourite pose, and gazed upon the pictures through her eyeglasses. "Poor Pa and Ma Eglamore!" she said, "they certainly look a trifle battered."

"It seems that they were put under the servants' bed," Mrs Cummin explained. "I am not responsible for where they were put. I simply ordered them out of the way. Do you blame me?"

"I certainly shouldn't be keen to have them hanging on my walls," Susy admitted. "They are my relations, but I make you a present of them. You can stick them under the bed or

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into the fire, for all I care," Susy, who was bothered by no silly sentiment, declared.

Juliet drove in the Plains' carriage with her mother and saw her installed in the Plains' old-fashioned but luxurious and most comfortable house, and had tea with her there (Mrs Cummin could have eaten her fingers by that time, and had to apologise for her most unseasonable appetite), and walked back by herself to her own home, feeling very strange and lonely in the unfamiliar place.

She was sitting, still in coat and hat, staring dully at nothing, feeling lonely, injured, and neglected, when her husband came home from his office.

"Been out?" he asked. "Ah, that's too bad!" when she told him yes. "I promised myself the pleasure of showing

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you first to the people of Hale. What did they think of you?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"That sounds as if you also didn't care."

"I don't."

He came and stood before her. "Well, are you going to kiss me?"

She made no movement to do so.

"Juliet!" he said, and bent above her. But she turned away her face, and he stood up again. He looked round the room with a certain satisfaction. "Your mother really gone?"

"You can see for yourself."

"Back to Birmingham?"

She did not deny the fact.

"She must have caught the 3.3 train then. I was afraid she would be too late."

"Afraid?"

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He laughed, and sat on the arm of her chair. "Don't be a naughty, sulky baby," he coaxed her. "You and I have got to stand by each other, whatever happens, sweet. Tell me, honestly now—whisper it, if you like—don't you think your mother behaved very foolishly?"

She jerked away her head and turned her lips from the ear that was held for the whisper: "I think someone else behaved very crossly, and unkindly, and selfishly, and——"

"You can't possibly mean that I did that?"

"I do—I do then! I'll never forgive you—never!"

He looked in a minute's silence at the back of her head, her face being hidden in the cushion of the chair. "It's your mother speaking, not you. I don't care to hear any more of Mrs Cummin's re-

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marks," he said, and got up and walked to the door. "It's time to get ready for dinner," he reminded her, stopping there.

She sat up and looked at the clock. "Oh, how happy I was at this time yesterday!" she lamented. "I was going to see my dear mother—that was why I was so happy."

He had not waited for the end of the speech, and she finished it with her face in the cushion again.

It was not until dinner was on the table that she roused herself to go upstairs, throw off her hat and coat, dash some water over hands and face. Her trousseau was an extensive one; hardly an occasion would present itself which had not its appropriate garment. She remembered the pretty, becoming frock which had been specially prepared for her to wear when she and her husband were to eat

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their dinner alone. She remembered the smiles with which it had been tried on, the happy thrill she had felt when her mother had instructed her as to when it should be worn. How blissfully happy she had expected to be. Now she was wretched.

She would not put on the frock. She would not even smooth her hair, ruffled by the cushion and her hat. Clarence would believe in the seriousness of her feelings when he saw she did not care how she looked. He would begin to understand what it was he had done.

She sat opposite to him in her short skirt of dim blue, and her white linen shirt blouse, her brown hair a little less neat than usual; and Clarence only thought how pretty she was, and what a child she looked, to be sitting at the head of his table. His heart grew soft

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as wax, his eyes tender as he watched her.

He seemed not to notice her carefully apathetic pose, her dreary monosyllables, but kept up cheerfully all the talk which, for Harriet's benefit, was necessary. At last (Harriet had left them to themselves then) Clarence made some delightfully witty remark at which, in spite of herself, Juliet laughed. He went round to her end of the table then, and knelt by her side and put his arms round her reluctant waist.

"Look at me, Juliet," he commanded.

She held herself away from him in her chair, but looked as she was told.

"Aren't you afraid?" he solemnly asked her.

"Afraid?"

"Don't you know that this is the first meal you and I have had together in

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our own home, and you have told me you are miserable? Juliet, how dare you say such a wicked, black, ungrateful thing as that? How dare you, Juliet?"

He was so very impressive in his manner that she was awed, and looked at him with wide eyes.

"Don't you remember," he went on, "that in this room, at this table, just where I've sat to-night looking across at you, I've sat for all these last months, and thought of you; longing with all my heart for the time when I should see you sitting here? But here is something I did not tell for fear that you might laugh. I used to pretend—so lonely I was without you—that you were really there, and talk to you in my own thoughts; and you—you used to answer back. You did, sweet, it's a fact. And the things you said to me—ah, Juliet!

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how can I tell you how sweet they were? Of ourselves always, and our future together we talked, and many things you told me of the happiness to come. But never once did you tell me that, with me beside you—your husband—all we've hoped for and talked of and lived for ours, you could ever be unhappy. Not once, Juliet. Never—never once!"

Her lip was trembling as a child's might have done. In these last happy days of her avowed love for him more than once his eyes had grown dim with grateful tears—there was a mist before them now, and his whispering voice was very tender.

"If I believed the words you said to me to-night, if I thought you said them from your heart, if I imagined they ever could come true, and feared that, having married you, I could not make you

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happy, do you know, Juliet, that my heart would be broken?"

But she was on his neck now, clinging to him, whispering that she was happy—oh, so happy, so happy—that she loved him, loved him, loved him; that it was her mother who——

Here the door opened, and Clarence had barely time to fly to his feet, and no time at all to look as if he had not been hugging his wife, when Harriet advanced into the room.

"'M, cook is sorry to have kept you waiting," she said, "but the kitchen stove is be'aving so badly to-night that the sav'ry weren't ready before, 'm."

Thereupon, in the fashion to which poor Mrs Cummin had so strongly objected, she thumped the dish upon the table.

The pair decorously seated opposite

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each other laughed a little unsteadily in each other's happy eyes.

“Oh, ought I really to have insisted on her handing the savoury round?” Juliet asked.

CHAPTER VI

A FRIENDLY DINNER

"**I** FEEL just like one of those horrible dreams when you go out shopping in your night-gown," Juliet declared.

She was wearing, instead of a hat, some white lace thrown over her brown hair, and her white evening dress was hidden by a long white coat lined with white silk, and the Eglamores were on their way to dine at Cuckoo Hall, the residence of the Plains.

"We always walk out to dinner in Hale—those of us who haven't carriages. It's all right," Clarence assured her. "Did Susy say who is to meet us?" he asked.

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"No," said Juliet faintly. "She only said a quiet dinner."

"Still, they aren't quite alone, I suppose? Do you know who's there?"

"No," said Juliet, fainter still. "At least—please don't ask, Clarence."

"Juliet, why didn't you tell me your mother was staying there? Why did you try to make me think she had gone home by the 3.3 train?"

"Mother particularly didn't wish me to tell you, Clarence."

"Did she particularly wish you to tell me a lie?"

"I didn't! Oh, Clarence! you do put things so horribly!"

"To act one, then? Do you think, for your mother's telling, you should keep a secret from me, Juliet? Ever such a little one? It was a quite useless attempt. I saw your mother and her

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luggage go past the office in the Plains' carriage; and before that I knew, for Susy called through the window to tell me she was coming; and even before that, and before you knew yourself, for Susy ran in on her way to The Cottage to tell me she was going to ask her. You can't do anything in a corner in a place like Hale."

"Not if your horrible Susy is always tittle-tattling. What has she to do in your office, pray?"

"Your mother, my dear, has made herself the topic of the day. Every man and woman I have come across has looked at me with a compelling curiosity in their eyes; a kind of dumb, piteous appeal to me to put them out of their misery; a 'Come-my-dear-fellow-do-tell-us-all-about-it' air. As soon as I got to the office this morning my uncle sent

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for me to his room. 'So I find you have already turned your mother-in-law out of your house?' he said."

"And you — what did you reply to that?" Juliet asked, with something ominous in her tone, and looking round into his face.

"I naturally replied that I didn't."

"But you did!" Juliet said, with a catch in her voice; "you did! And however much I try I can't forget it."

Mrs Cummin had no objection to feel herself the heroine of a dramatic situation, and was a little disappointed to miss the start of surprise she had expected when her son-in-law's gaze should fall on her unlooked-for presence. His polite and quite unembarrassed greeting, although it may have relieved the tension of the situation, was not entirely welcome.

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She had meant to act beautifully. To be dignified and a little cold, but to rebuke his embarrassment with an offered hand and a demeanour which should at once put to rest any doubt as to her behaviour in the young man's breast.

By Eglamore's friendly and unconcerned deportment it was evident he had harboured no misgivings; he appeared rather indifferent to than concerned by her appearance; and Mrs Cummin felt the ground to be cut from under her feet. She felt checked in her magnanimous intentions likewise, and assumed towards Clarence a frigidity and a hauteur she had not intended to show.

"We're only a family party," Susy explained in her loud and hearty tones. "Your Uncle Isaac's here to keep you in countenance, Clarence; and, for fear you lawyers should talk business after

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dinner, I've got in Captain Sands from next door to keep you company. We're an odd woman ; but if Juliet will go in with Uncle Isaac, and Captain Sands will take Mrs Cummin, mother and I can hang on to Clarence's coat sleeves and make the most of him between us."

Susy had the reputation for being a perfect hostess, and the Plains' dinner-parties were the most popular in Hale. No stiffness or want of geniality, no awkward silences or obviously forced conversations, were met with at Susy's table, her friends said. (The table, of course, was her mother's, but no one in Hale any longer bothered themselves to remember the fact, and Mrs Plain was quite content it should be forgotten.)

"No one else could say the things she says," they admitted, now and then, to each other. "Why is it that they sound,

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not offensive, but positively charming in Susy?"

"It's because she's so absolutely frank and good-natured," was the stereotyped answer.

"It's because she has money, and a nice house and lovely garden, and carriages and horses and servants at command, and because she gives such beautiful dinners," might, perhaps, more truthfully have been hinted.

The present little party, informal, and hurriedly convened as it was, proved no exception to the general success of such functions at Cuckoo Hall. Or so it seemed to the Plains and their intimate friends, talking uninterrupted Hale gossip of people and events, with allusion, with inference, with innuendo, of which the two ladies from Birmingham knew nothing; laughing at jokes all the more

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dear and humorous because they were old friends and had been laughed at so often before.

Mrs Cummin, a person by no means accustomed to the situation at present described as being "out of it"—indeed, generally a leader of conversation in her own circle—started, with courage and perseverance, subjects on which she and Juliet were fitted to discourse: Birmingham subjects. The rest listened with polite indifference. What were the affairs of Birmingham to a man with luck enough to have been born in Hale? She wished to tell a story concerning her own horses and the motor car of a neighbour. The story reminded Mrs Plain of the fact that Popham's children's donkey, which had last Tuesday lain down in the High Street and attempted to roll with the youngest Popham on its back, was now sold to the

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local fruiterer. She introduced and told with spirit a tale of a celebrated political meeting at which her husband had heard a repartee, well worth the repeating, from Mr Joseph Chamberlain. Juliet and her husband, who had heard the witticism before, were prepared to laugh as in duty bound. The attention of Mr Isaac Egla-more, who was deaf, was arrested.

"Was that old Chambers in the High Street?" he asked; and when it was explained to him that the *jeu d'esprit* emanated not from the lips of the Hale butcher, but of the Member for Birmingham, he took no further interest.

Clarence looked across at his wife often and anxiously. Very ardently he desired her to win the heart of his Uncle Isaac, by whose side she sat. He saw a bored, childish face, a set smile upon the lips. She had been told she was to use all her

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powers of charming to procure the good will of the man to whom her husband was to owe a future fortune. She, who had been found irresistible by the nephew, had expected to find small difficulty with the uncle, but was destined to be undeceived. The old man remembered to turn, now and again, to the girl with a word or two intended as a key to the interesting converse in which he took an active part; but having once decided in his own mind she was immature, and not of the order of beauty which had appealed to him in his youth, he looked at her with small interest and paid her no more attention than politeness demanded.

Five times during dinner he remembered to ask her if she liked Hale, his attention wandering even while he bent an ear for her answer. Four times Juliet made reply she liked Hale very much.

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On the fifth she was unluckily moved to say, by way of variety, she did not like it at all.

The other replies he could not have heard, or why had he asked her again? This he heard but could not believe his ears.

"Eh, what?" he asked, and bent nearer, his twinkling eyes upon the company, as though requesting their attention to this marvel which had come to pass. "Not like it? Not like it? Did I understand you to say you don't like the place you've come to live in? Hale? Speak a little louder, please."

They were all listening. It seemed to Juliet that everywhere unfriendly eyes were turned upon her.

"I daresay I shall like it in time," she amended in a small voice.

"But now? Your first impression is you don't like it?"

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"No, I don't," Juliet said, and out-faced the dismay in her husband's eyes.

"And why, pray?"

"She hasn't a reason. She doesn't mean what she says," Clarence interposed.

"I do," said Juliet, grown reckless. "It's small, it's not interesting, its shops are poky——"

"Nowhere to spend your money?" Susy inquired, with her broad smile. "Juliet's come among us with a pocketful of money and she can't find anything in Hale to spend it on," she explained.

"Have you brought a pocketful of money?" the old lawyer asked, his bright, unfriendly eyes upon her.

"No," Juliet avowed. "I've spent my first quarter's money on my honeymoon. I haven't any now at all."

"But you're equal to spending Clarence's, I suppose?"

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And Juliet answered she supposed she was. Whereat they all laughed.

But although Clarence laughed too, Juliet knew he was not pleased. "It won't take her long to spend mine," he said. "You'll find there's shops enough in Hale for that purpose, Juliet."

"I don't want to spend your money a bit, Clarence," she protested, with a pitiful look at him.

"But you just now said you did," the horrid uncle beside her insisted.

Then Mrs Cummin dashed in to her daughter's assistance with a description of the Birmingham shops. She enlarged on the gaieties of the charming place, the public gardens, the theatres, the music halls, the concerts, the picture galleries.

"We've got nothing like that except once a year, on Fair day," Susy Plain said.

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A speech which her mother and Captain Sands found very humorous. She had to repeat it louder for Uncle Isaac's benefit, who laughed, sniggeringly.

"There's merry-go-rounds and swing-boats and Punch-and-Judy shows, all down the High Street on Fair day," he explained to Mrs Cummin. "'Tisn't safe to compare Birmingham with Hale till you've seen us at Fair time."

Mrs Cummin, who did not understand why they were so amused, said she believed there were no fairs of that sort in Birmingham; and if there were, of course, she should not have permitted Juliet to go to them.

In the drawing-room the Hale ladies were more friendly and sympathetic, and Juliet was no longer afraid of having her remarks distorted or misunderstood.

"I do hope they'll be a long, long time

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before they come in," she said, thinking of the old lawyer, of whose ill-natured snigger she was afraid, and of Captain Sands, who had looked at her through his single eyeglass in a way she had hoped was appreciative, but who had laughed at her when the others laughed. "Isn't it cosy here, mother? Such a lovely, lovely big drawing-room. Or it seems so after my tot."

A remark which at once started Mrs Cummin off into speculations as to how Juliet could ever possibly give a dinner-party with such ridiculous accommodation.

Juliet, secretly rather relieved by the impossibility, was of opinion she never could do so with her present cook; and told how they had waited ten minutes for the savoury last night, and how there had been no tea this afternoon, because cook had forgotten to put on the kettle.

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The having gone without her tea was a misfortune for which all three ladies condoled with the poor victim.

But it was when she learnt that Juliet had actually walked from The Cottage to Cuckoo Hall that the poor mother was bitterly enraged.

"Why, on earth, did not your husband have you driven?" she fiercely inquired. "He remembers, I suppose, that we are not in the habit of walking out to dinner-parties at home! What, I wonder, does he expect your father to say when he understands the kind of provision which has been made for his daughter's comfort?"

The Plains also were sympathetic. Susy, who loved the feminine occupation known as piling on of agony, announced that no man was eligible for matrimony who couldn't afford to keep a pair of horses

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or a motor. Most of them she herself would not look at unless they could keep the lot, and live in jolly good style, too. Mrs Plain hoped that the poor bride had not taken cold, had noticed how pale she looked; felt, in her motherly way, her hands and feet, and adjured Susy to remind her always to send the carriage for Juliet Eglamore in future when she was coming there to dinner.

But although Juliet and her mother were grateful exceedingly for that kind promise, and although Mrs Eglamore dined at the Plains' house in the future many times, she invariably had to walk there. The Plains always forgot the carriage.

The ground was dry, the air soft and warm, no people were about at that hour; the Eglamores, walking home from Cuckoo Hall, had the night and the stars to themselves.

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Clarence had won at Bridge and was in high spirits ; but he had stayed half-an-hour after Juliet's mother had declared the girl was tired and should be taken home. He wanted to tell his wife all about the incidents of the game ; of his own bad hands, of Susy's good ones, of his luck in having got her for a partner, of her skill and cunning. Juliet did not wish to hear the praise of Susy or of anyone.

"You like her, don't you?" Eglamore inquired of her. "She is such a good sort! Everyone likes old Susy."

She liked her well enough, Juliet explained ; only she was sick of hearing her called a good sort.

"Well, my dear, you'll hear it pretty often, and may as well get used to it ; for everyone thinks her so."

"She's got everything her heart can

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wish for. A mother to pamper her, and laugh at all her jokes, and think her wonderful; carriages and horses and well-trained servants, and—and great lovely rooms. Who wouldn't be a good sort?"

Her husband pressed against his side the hand on his arm. "And haven't you a few things poor Susy hasn't got?" he inquired.

She pulled the hand away. "I can't hold you because I have to carry the train of my dress, and to keep my coat close at the throat so I don't get my death of cold, mother said——"

"But aren't you better off than good old Susy?" he persisted, filled with the sentimental desire that she should say sweet things to him beneath the stars.

"I have a husband, you mean?" She stopped to re-collect the soft frills of her frock, and the silk frills of her underskirt

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which would slip away. "But if she is rich and such a 'good sort' she could have that too, I suppose, quite easily?"

There was a husband there to-night ready to pop down her throat if she would open it wide enough, she was told.

Juliet thought the mouth was wide enough. Was it Uncle Isaac who wanted to jump down?

Heavens, no! Picture poor old Uncle Isaac with a wife! Where had Juliet's eyes been? It was Captain Sands who had been trying to make love to Susy for years, if she would only give him the chance.

"I don't believe it," Juliet said. "I like Captain Sands. He was the nicest there, except mother and me and you."

"Poor Uncle Isaac!"

"I hate poor Uncle Isaac. He is an ugly, deaf, rude old man."

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"He is none of those things; and if he is, you are not to say so. He is my uncle, and the man of most importance to me in the world. I expect you, if you don't like him, at anyrate to behave as if you did."

"And I," said Juliet, with a quaver in her fluty voice, "expected you to like my dear mother."

"Ah, that's another matter!" he said. "Look at the stars. There's Orion, you see! 'Downward bent Orion, louting on one knee.' Doesn't the little town look jolly and peaceful under them? Dozens of times I've walked home from Susy's (I always went there when I hadn't anything better to do, and that was pretty often) and thought all the way how you and I should walk home together beneath them."

"Didn't you sometimes think, for a

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change, how we might be seated comfortably in a carriage, driving home from Susy's?"

"There's your mother again!" he said. "I perceive we can't keep off her. Ask her if she had a carriage at your age. I don't believe she had. At hers you shall have one; I promise you. In the meantime, shall I carry you? Well, your dress, then?"

He took the dainty frills over one arm and helped her along with another round her shoulders. And although their progress under those conditions was certainly a slow one, Clarence was content and Juliet forgot to be tired and cross.

CHAPTER VII

CLARENCE SEEKS A REMEDY

"**D**ID I look nicely last night?" Juliet asked of her husband, and could but be gratified by his answer. "I think that funny Captain Sands liked the look of me too," she told him with satisfaction.

"Oh, Sands!" Eglamore ejaculated with the accent of contempt.

"He did admire me, then," Juliet persisted. "Don't you know, you foolish old boy, that women can always tell, without a word being spoken, when men consider them pretty? There are heaps and heaps of them, besides you, who think me so, I can tell you. You needn't be so horrid."

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"But Sands!" he persisted. "You haven't seen him yet prancing along the High Street, admiring himself in the shop windows, staring into women's faces, hanging on, when they're fools enough to let him, to their skirts. It's the one drawback to Cuckoo Hall, to have that silly ass always hee-hawing around. Which reminds me; he's sure to try to get a footing here; he'd play the tame cat on any hearth. I don't choose to have him on mine; and you're not to be seen with him anywhere, Juliet."

"But, Clarence, how silly you are! How can I meet him in your Susy's house and snub him in other places?"

"Very well. Women know how to do such things."

"But I don't, Clarence, really. I haven't an idea how to snub anybody—*really!*"

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"Leave him to me, then. But he'll know better than to come here when I'm in the way. He hasn't a man friend in the world."

"He said he wanted to see the apple-trees in bloom."

Clarence turned sharply on his wife. "How did he know they were in bloom, pray?"

"It's the time of year, Clarence."

"Be out, then. If you know he's coming, nothing's easier. Tell Harriet, at once, if Captain Sands calls—you're out."

But Mrs Cummin, whom Juliet of course consulted in the matter, was of opinion that her daughter was not, as a new-comer in the place, in the position to adopt such a step. Where was the sense of beginning by making herself unpopular? If there were anything against

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the character of Captain Sands it would be, of course, a different matter ; in which case the Plains would not be on such excellent terms with him. However, to make quite sure she would ask Susy herself.

Susy laughed delightedly at the question. Harm in poor old "Fanny" Sands? Why, he was as harmless as the sucking pig! Impropriety in Juliet, or any other young married woman, receiving him? Heavens, no! Imagine that absurd boy Clarence turning jealous of Fanny!

The joke was too good to be kept to herself; Susy was always liberal with the interesting matter supplied her by the people who gave her their confidences, and distributed her friends' secrets right and left. Having told her mother, who received the story delightedly, she went through the little iron gate which con-

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nected the grounds of Cuckoo Hall with the garden of The Hermitage, where Captain Sands dwelt with his maiden sister. On the lawn before the drawing-room windows Miss Plain found her neighbours engaged in a single at croquet, at which gentle game the Captain excelled. Susy beckoned him on one side, and the maiden sister, used to the free-and-easy manners of Susy, meekly knocked the balls about until such time as her brother should return to her.

That he had been too pronounced in his attentions to Clarence Eglamore's bride, that Clarence was jealous, and his wife under strict orders not to receive him when he called, Captain Sands was told —(he had been a Captain of Volunteers for a short season far away in his youth) —and nothing could have pleased the man better or more deeply flattered him.

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"She has orders not to admit you—fancy Clarence coming out as strong as that! But I knew there'd be diversions—go and see what happens."

"I'll go at once," he declared.

He never even returned to his sister on the croquet lawn, but went and changed into a faultlessly fitting suit of dark grey, recurled his small and fair moustache with some appliance he had for that purpose, touched up his eyebrows where the silly arch had a little faded at the corners, and with his glass in his eye and his familiar smirk minced along the High Street, gratified at heart and prepared for conquest.

Juliet had spent all her morning with her mother, and had rushed home to give her husband lunch. It had been a meal which had proved to neither so delightful as should have been the case,

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because Juliet was under orders to introduce the subject of a pony-trap which the Plains agreed with Mrs Cummin in thinking it was impossible she should do without.

People living in the country around Hale were sure to call; how were their calls to be returned? And, again, during the long hours of the day her husband was at the office what a resource it would be for Juliet, who had been used to much carriage exercise, to drive herself about!

But Clarence had not seen his way to starting a pony carriage; the hours he was away from his wife were likely to be longer instead of shorter he feared, as Uncle Isaac, who was growing old, might wish to withdraw by degrees from attendance at the office. Juliet had felt it due to her mother to complain and to

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persist; and so the lunch hour had been spoilt.

She must, of course, rush to give her mother the result of her faithful efforts; but as she opened the door of The Cottage to sally forth for that purpose, she discovered Captain Sands upon the step.

Remembering her recent conversation with her husband, at sight of the visitor she must blush crimson. The blush and the evident trepidation of her manner delighted the ladies' man, and encouraged him to make himself very agreeable.

He was ever full of small talk, of a niggling kind of curiosity.

During the hour he stayed, having very quickly inspected the orchard trees, and secured a pink bud or two of the apple-blossom for his coat, he managed to learn all that he did not already know

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of the interior economy of the Eglamore *ménage*. Juliet, flattered by his interest, and pleased to find she could keep the first visitor she had entertained alone amused, told all there was to tell. Told that Clarence was not so nice in Hale, where he had horrible business to attend to, as he had been on his honeymoon—not half so sweet. Told of the impossibility of her housemaid being dressed to open the door to callers in the afternoon, told how much her mother wished her to have a larger house, and how she herself longed for a pony carriage.

So used she was to Mrs Cummin's views and their setting forth that she found herself, now and again, using her very phrases.

He had already heard the story of Mrs Cummin's self-exile from her daughter's home, and knew the history of the portrait

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feud. It was easy to get Juliet to show him the dining-room, he professing a great interest in the architecture of The Cottage ; once within the room it was natural to turn the conversation to the pictures.

"Don't look at them ! They're such frights," Juliet said.

But he would look, and find resemblance, or no resemblance, to Clarence. His quick eye descried Cousin Anna's copies of Landseer still with their faces to the wall. He asked to see those works of art, and discreetly admired them ; called them delicious bits of colour ; discerned at once how they would lighten the room.

"There is the place for them," he said, and threw a white hand at the recesses. "On either side of the fireplace they would show to perfection."

"So mother thought," Juliet, grown grave, admitted.

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"Mrs Cummin was right!" he cried enthusiastically.

"This, you see," said Juliet, looking round upon her possession with some pride in it, "is the nicest room we have. It is a pity it must be disfigured by those ugly, battered old pictures of Clarence's ugly, battered old relations."

"It is a thousand pities!"

"And when you come in at the door, as mother says, they are the first things you see; while, as long as you stay you can't forget them."

"They hit you in the eye," agreed the Captain. "If it were my house I should find some inconspicuous place for them and should replace them by these charming works of art."

He was charming, himself, Juliet thought. Much older in the light of day than he had appeared overnight.

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Juliet was glad of that, and felt more at her ease with him. Ringing for tea she confided to him that she did not at all know if Harriet would let her have it. When it came, and it was found that Harriet had forgotten to bring the tea-spoons, she consulted him as to whether it would be desirable to ring to point out to Harriet the deficiency or if it were possible to do without the tea-spoons. She was delighted when he pronounced them superfluous, and stirred her tea and his own with his gold pencil-case.

On the subject of the desired pony-trap he took such sensible views. The presence of Mrs Eglamore at certain functions, to be given at certain houses, so many miles distant, would be considered indispensable. If she had no carriage how was she to get there? She might bicycle the distance, perhaps,

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but then, how was she to wear her pretty garden-party frocks?

Altogether, they spent a happy and profitable hour together, Captain Sands storing in his mind, made for the retention of such matter only, material for another enjoyable hour with Susy on his return; and they were still gaily chattering and munching the almond icing off the wedding-cake when Clarence came home.

He had been moved by Juliet's plaint of her loneliness without him to postpone some work he wanted to do, to fling himself on his bicycle, to fly home and invite her to go for a half-hour's ride. He greeted the visitor civilly enough, but went at once to see to the condition of his wife's bicycle; and he did not return till Sands had left.

"I told you not to receive that gabbling fool," he reminded his wife.

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"I like him," Juliet declared; "I find him charming."

"You can't, really!" He looked at her in astonishment. He had felt it to be the crown, absolutely unexpected, certainly unmerited, of his life that he himself in the eyes of this girl had been found charming. But if she were so easily pleased? He felt a shadowing of his joy, and a decrease of self-gratulation.

"I do! He is most interesting and amusing, and tells such funny stories, and knows a lot about furniture and dresses and—and pictures."

Clarence gave a laugh which should have accompanied a shrug if he had been a man of gesture.

"Oh, well! If you think so!" he said.

He did not doubt that he would be able to regulate the course of his wife's friendship for this man, or for any man.

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There was no good in badgering her about it; he would see to it himself.

Presently he had seen to another matter with which he did not think it advisable to trouble Juliet.

In listening to his wife's continual petitions for larger expenditure, her complainings and occasional fault-findings, he knew that she was but her mother's mouthpiece. Now and then he caught the trick of speech, the very tones of the woman he disliked. The sooner the dreaded influence was removed the better. But the Plains were hospitable people; they and Juliet continued to beg of Mrs Cummin to stay. Eglamore presently took the matter into his own hand, therefore, and wrote to Mr Cummin suggesting that he should recall his wife.

"It's hard lines on the poor man," he

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acknowledged to himself; but he did not shrink from his task.

"I told you frankly my circumstances," he wrote to his father-in-law. "At present my income, with the hundred a year you allow Juliet, only amounts to five hundred pounds. I do not, therefore, feel justified in taking a larger house, in increasing my quite adequate staff of servants, in starting a carriage. Mrs Cummin does not seem capable of grasping the position, and Juliet, who sees for the time as she does, is agitating for these things. It pains me to refuse her anything, and grieves me beyond expression that she should already learn to be dissatisfied. It is only now, at the beginning of our lives, that I fear her mother's influence; the habit of her life is too strong for Juliet, just at first. Let me have my wife to myself for a few

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months and all will be well. You are the only person who can help at this pass, and it is for Juliet's sake more than mine that I ask you to do so. You will read between the lines and understand more than I care to write, and will in any case let the matter of this letter be between ourselves."

It was only after having suffered much grievance at the hands of Mrs Cummin, and having given the subject his serious thought, that he thus put the situation before his father-in-law, for whom he had as much liking as was compatible with a slight contempt.

CHAPTER VIII

MR CUMMIN IN EXTREMIS

“**N**OT feeling very well. Come home.
No cause for alarm.”

The Plains, their visitor, and Juliet, as usual spending the afternoon with them, were in their neighbour's garden, Mrs Eglamore and Captain Sands doing their utmost to beat at croquet the stout Susy, redoubtable champion of the game, playing with two balls against them.

Juliet's rose face turned white to the lips as she read the message over her mother's shoulder. Much as she admired and loved that lady, she had nevertheless known that her absence from him must

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be counted as in the nature of a holiday by her father.

"Father must be very ill—he must be dying, to have sent for you, mother," she said.

Mrs Cummin too was shaken, and was very much of her daughter's opinion.

"It is undoubtedly a stroke," she said.

Her face also was white. She looked away from them all, away from the smooth lawn with the gay-coloured balls and the white hoops, ringed in with the hedge of close-cut box, back into her past and forward into her future, in the moment's pause.

"What is the first train?" then she asked; and Captain Sands hurried indoors through the open window to consult a time-table.

Mrs Cummin turned to Juliet. "Dr Spooner mentioned to me that your

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father was growing stout," she said. "I knew at once what he meant; he meant apoplexy. Your father has undoubtedly had a stroke."

Juliet sat down on a garden chair, put her hands over her face, and began to cry. But about her mother there was only a tightening of the lips which for a moment had shaken, and a shrewd eye looking onward from her husband's death-bed into her future. She would be rich, could do what, go where she liked. She and her only child would not have to be parted then. In that moment's outlook—who shall blame her or say that he or she at a crisis can keep thought under control? Who has a mind so regulated that, startled out of its ordinary habit, it can be depended on to entertain only orthodox views?—she saw herself settled in a commanding house in the High

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Street of Hale, social chief of the place, putting Juliet into her rightful position, and showing the provincial hostess how things should be done in Birmingham fashion.

Then she turned to Juliet, of whose love for her father she had hitherto been jealous. She would make up for it now.

"You must come too," she said.

Juliet lifted a startled face: "Oh, mother! Do you think so? Is he really dying, mother?" she wept. She looked around upon them all helplessly. "I want Clarence," she said.

It was found that there was a good two hours before the next train. Juliet, who must go home to pack a bag, could call in and see Clarence on the way.

"Before you decide to take Juliet, wire to inquire what is amiss," Susy sensibly

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suggested ; but Mrs Cummin would not hear of the plan.

“ We should be only put off with ‘ No cause for alarm ’ as you see they say here,” she said, with a finger on the telegram. “ They naturally would not tell me the extent of the misfortune. Besides, why should I be told? I know. Looking at my husband, I have many times said to myself: ‘ Sooner or later—apoplexy.’ ”

Mrs Plain, whose own husband had died of apoplexy, and who believed herself to be threatened by that disease, here shed a tear and put out a sympathetic hand to grasp the prospective widow's.

“ The first stroke is not always fatal,” she encouraged.

“ It depends on the subject,” said Susy.

“ And my husband is a bad subject,” Mrs Cummin declared. Her husband was prepared, she told them, his will made.

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All her anxiety was for him, she had none for herself. She knew quite well the contents of her husband's will, never having countenanced the keeping of secrets from a wife. Everything was left to her, and at her decease to her daughter. Mrs Cummin had seen to it. For what had now happened she had insisted he should be prepared. "I shall not have to undergo the grief so many poor women experience, of finding myself unprovided for," she assured Mrs Plain.

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It was Juliet's first appearance at Egla-more's office. The clerk who led her to his private room was more than surprised to see her with the tears rolling down her cheeks, and to hear her ask for Clarence in a voice choked with sobs. She remembered her husband's injunction, however, to be very kind and civil to the

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clerks, and she put out a hand to this one, and said how much she liked the salad bowl they had all subscribed for, and asked how he was, in a smothered voice.

"What on earth!" Clarence cried, looking up from his work with a startled face. He went to her and she threw herself into his arms with fresh weeping, and disclosed to him that her father was dying, that her mother was recalled home, that she was going with her, that she could not possibly, possibly leave her husband, and that therefore he was going too.

Without divulging the part he had played of which the telegram was the outcome, it was difficult for Eglamore to convince his wife that her father's state was probably not a parlous one, and she was cut to the quick when he refused to go with her to Birmingham,

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and astonished beyond measure when he forbade her going there.

How could Clarence be so cruel when her poor father was dying?

"Your father is not dying, I tell you. As well as I am, on the contrary. Or only a little seedy, perhaps."

"You can't possibly know, Clarence."

"I do know. If you were away from me, Juliet, I should wire that I was ill to get you back. He is anxious for Mrs Cummin's society."

"You know he isn't—poor father! And poor mother, travelling all that way alone!"

"Mrs Cummin can take care of herself very well."

"How horrid you are! I believe you hate my mother."

"What does it matter, since I love you? Let your mother go, sweet; you and I will be all the happier."

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Juliet had sense enough to believe it would be so ; at the same time she had the loyalty to feel she did not wish to be happy without her mother. Also she was afraid to return and tell Mrs Cummin she could not go without Clarence's consent, which he would not give.

"Mother will think because I am married I have deserted her," she said. "She has only me," she cried, and sobbed over the reflection. "I must go back to bid her good-bye."

This also Eglamore would not allow. "Write her good-bye from here," he said, "and I will send an office-boy up with the letter."

She took the pen he passed her, and looked down upon the sheet of paper placed for her, then, uncertainly, across to him who smiled into her tear-wet face. "I didn't think you were going to be a

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bit like this when I married you," she told him.

"Awful revelation, isn't it?"

"You are a horrible, cruel, wicked, unnatural husband, and if my dearest father dies I will never forgive you."

"I promise you he won't die. Get on with your letter."

She was a long time writing it. He looked across at her many times, lifting his eyes from the copy of the deed he was reading over, to watch her, sometimes, scribbling a few words with great celebrity, sometimes pausing, the end of her pen in her teeth, her tear-wet eyes fixed miserably before her, her breath coming sobbingly. Once he got up and leant over her, his hands on her shoulders, pressing them reassuringly. She threw down her pen and covered what she had written with both hands.

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"Secrets?" he said; and she hastily withdrew the shielding hands; but he had gone back to his place.

Presently, Isaac Eglamore came in, to ask a question of his junior partner.

A more than usually affecting sentence had sent a flow of tears gushing from Juliet's eyes. She dabbed her cheeks energetically with her handkerchief, while her husband's relative gazed at her with surprise through his glasses, and her husband laughed.

"I haven't been beating her," he said. "She's only unhappy because her mother is going away."

The old lawyer glanced unsympathetically. What a fool the girl was! What had Clarence, who was a clever fellow, seen in such an immature thing—a cry-baby?

"When girls get husbands they've

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done with mothers, haven't they?" he inquired in his grating voice.

Juliet gave him a fierce glance. "I don't wish to have done with my mother, you see," she said.

"You should have thought of that before, my dear," he told her, with a laugh that was like a bark, and turned to his nephew with his more important matter.

"You hate my dear mother — we're quits, then. I hate your horrid, detestable, deaf, disagreeable old uncle; and if he comes in again I'll throw the inkstand at him," Juliet threatened when the old lawyer had gone, the fierceness of the speech a little marred by the convulsive catching of her breath.

"Clarence is quite certain dear father is not seriously ill," Juliet wrote, "and he always seems to know about things. . . . I hate to think of you going all

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alone, dearest mother, but unless I tear myself in two I cannot be with you and Clarence both. I wish I could do this, for I know I can never be really happy away from either of you. . . . I am crying as I write, dearest mother, to say how unhappy I am that you left my home. I could never tell you half how unhappy I am. I hate those hideous portraits. When my eyes fall on them I long to tear them in a thousand pieces. I shall remember all you have told me to do, and try to get a larger house as you wish. Perhaps those frightful portraits might be lost in the removal. Dearest mother, I never for a single instant forget you. Your Juliet."

Mrs Cummin, who had not wept over her husband's apoplectic attack, shed tears over Juliet's letter.

If she had known what the parting of

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mother and child would be like, never, never would she have sanctioned the girl's marriage to any but a Birmingham man. As for Clarence! she had been utterly deceived in him, penetrating in the matter of character as she was. To keep an only child from her dying father!

Susy and her mother were very good to the afflicted widow that was to be. Mrs Plain, herself, went in the carriage with her to the station; they comforted and coddled her with every mark of good will. But they were both very glad to come home and have their house to themselves. There was something too strenuous about Mrs Cummin for their taste.

"We won't have her any more, mother; mind that," Susy said. "I'm very fond of Clarence Eglamore, but even the pleasure of hearing him abused without

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measure palls in time. And as for Juliet"—here she lifted her broad brown hand and brought it down thumpingly on her knee—"the very name of Juliet—Juliet's hair, Juliet's dresses, the luxuries to which Juliet has been accustomed—makes me sick!"

CHAPTER IX

WHERE LILIES GROW

THE calm which, for the first day or so after Mrs Cummin's departure, reigned in The Cottage was at times a very melancholy one.

"It seems so wicked to laugh and be happy when I don't know if my dear father is dead or alive," Juliet always said when cajoled into a betrayal of light-heartedness. She would not leave home lest a telegram should come, and while there stood with her face glued to the window, looking out for the messenger.

"No news is good news," Clarence assured her.

But Juliet was afraid to be hopeful.

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"Mother wishes to spare me the shock. She intends to write and break the news to me," she said.

He awoke to find her crying beside him in the night. "Dear father had only me in the wide world," she sobbed.

"He had your dear mother," Eglamore grimly reminded her.

She ignored the remark. "I will never forgive myself for having left my dear, dear father," she wept.

On the morning of the second day of her absence came a letter from Mrs Cummin entirely setting Juliet's mind at rest on the score of her father's health.

"He had a headache," she wrote, "and felt low. Is not the selfishness of man incredible? As far as I can learn from the servants—he himself is strangely reserved on the subject—he never absented himself from business for one hour. For

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the sake of a half-imbecile craving for my society he has dragged me away from you; and from all I was doing for you. At your father's request, I have given him an exact and truthful description of the home Clarence has prepared for you. Needless to say, being who he is, he declines to take my view of the style of living which is due to you as your father's daughter, and in consideration of Clarence's prospects. All the same, my dear child, you may be assured that I am the best judge of this matter, and I expect you not to let Clarence rest until he puts you in the position you have every right to fill."

There was much more to this effect, and then followed this pregnant postscript: "I do not quite believe in the anxiety of your father for my society, and have a suspicion from his manner

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that there is something behind. If so, he will find, in attempting to deceive me, he has made a mistake."

"Didn't I tell you he was all right? In future, perhaps, you will believe me," Clarence said when Juliet gave him the news. She was filled with an exquisite relief. She came and embraced her husband in the fulness of her joy, and sat on his knee, and begged him to stay away from the office that they might have a glorious day together, and that she might be relieved of the tremendous responsibility of ordering lunch. In the West Woods, three miles out of Hale, lilies of the valley grew wild. They would go on their bicycles and take some sandwiches, and feast on them in the sight of the lilies. When they were engaged he had told her of these West Woods, and had calculated that the lilies

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would be in bloom on their return from their honeymoon, promising that he would take her there to gather a bunch of them as big as her pretty head. Well, the honeymoon was over, the lilies were in flower—let them go!

Of course he could not. Having just returned from a month's holiday how could he, in conscience, take more? A clerk was away ill, the office full of work. He would try to get home for an hour in the afternoon, just to give his wife a look, but he would be muddled even to do this.

"I should have liked to be happy just for to-day," Juliet sighed.

She walked as far as the telegraph office with her husband on his way to his office, and despatched an ecstatic message: "Darling father, I am so happy you are better," taking the precaution to send the telegram to Mr Cummin's

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place of business. It was more than probable, she knew, should it fall into the hands of the mistress of Marchmont, her father's eyes would not be gladdened by the perusal.

The message was sent off by ten in the morning. She had then to order four cutlets for lunch, a chicken, a bunch of asparagus and half-a-pound of tomatoes for dinner ; which arduous task performed, she would not have a thing to do until Clarence returned at two.

She came with a lagging step out of the greengrocer's shop, the empty four hours stretching lengthily before her, and there was Captain Sands, in his grey flannel suit and his panama hat, holding his bicycle on the sunny pavement of the High Street, awaiting her.

What was she going to do with herself on that perfect morning?

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Absolutely nothing. An eloquent spreading out of her white-gloved hands and a pathetic smile on the round face beneath the white hat announced the emptiness of existence.

"I was coming to seek you," he said. "I heard you speaking of the West Woods the other day; I've seen the agent, and got leave. You want to see the lilies; come with me there."

Seeing there was no hope of Clarence taking her there, what could be more delightful? Juliet rushed with a light step to order the four cutlets, but was diverted from her way into the confectioner's, where she was some time in choosing the chocolate which was to sustain them on their jaunt. Juliet was a connoisseur in the matter of chocolate, and the valiant Captain was as fond as the girl of sweetmeats. After

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which Mrs Eglamore's bicycle must be fetched.

The West Woods were lovelier than Juliet had thought. In Marchmont there was a square yard of kitchen garden given up to the growth of lilies of the valley, long ago, in Juliet's childhood, pronounced to be her favourite flowers. What would Swann, the home gardener, say when he was told that here acres of them were growing wild?

"Not for anything would I have missed the sight!" she declared.

It seemed she never could be tired of sitting, a spot of dry ground carefully chosen where not one flower should be injured, her hands clasped about her knees, to drink in the scent and gaze upon the lovely sight.

The very first lilies she plucked Captain Sands begged for his coat. Of course

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she gave them, even helped to pin them there. The fact, established by Mrs Plain's painstaking computation, that this surprisingly youthful-looking, elderly person was a year older than Juliet's father, made her relations with the gay bachelor very pleasant and easy.

He was not an intellectual person, poor "Fanny" Sands! but who should say he was not a pleasant enough companion for a girl just out of her teens?

Juliet's feet, as she sat to gaze upon the lilies, protruded beyond the hem of her white dress, and for half-an-hour they discussed quite happily the shape of her boot-toes, of his, of those of their acquaintance; argued as to whether they should be round, square, or pointed. When she had pinned a flower in his buttonhole he had remembered an amusing instance of a man in Hale, whose

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circumstances and education should have fitted him to know better, who always wore lilies of the valley in his coat, backed by a scarlet geranium.

"It will explain, better than if I talked for an hour, the kind of man he is," Sands declared; and Juliet seemed quite to understand.

Over the train of thought to which this led they discovered a mutual sensibility which could not but be pleasing. There were people who did not consider such errors in taste of importance, he pointed out, and she lamented that so few people really *knew*.

"Could you live with a woman who wore a woollen blouse with a cotton skirt?" Juliet demanded.

Whereupon Captain Sands was encouraged to relate how once he had thought of asking a lady to marry him

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who appeared one day, and expected him to walk down the High Street by her side, with her hands in lavender cotton gloves. He delighted Juliet, besides, by mentioning the fact that he could never love a woman with a sore lip.

In such diverting converse, on such a sunny morning of white-blossomed May, how the hours flew! By the time they had satisfied themselves that they could not possibly carry another lily of the valley if they plucked it, they found that to go home to the two o'clock lunch they must do the four miles in fifteen minutes—a feat sufficiently difficult to start with.

One mile of the four accomplished, and Juliet's hind wheel was discovered to be flat; a catastrophe Juliet, looking every minute at the watch on her wrist, found to be very distressing. But when, the puncture being mended, and a fresh start

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made, the front wheel went flat within a hundred yards, she was moved to look on the occurrence in a humorous light. And when, this disaster also repaired and they were on their way again, Captain Sands' tyre burst with a loud report, Juliet was compelled to laugh so long and so helplessly that she nearly had hysterics.

As, pushing their machines, and not hurrying at all, for where was the use now?—they neared The Cottage, they came upon the master of the little place on his way back to his office. A turn of the road brought them suddenly face to face. The Captain was looking, with the smile other men called a smirk, in his companion's face, and Juliet was chattering in her high young voice with her lilies in her hand, and the rose of health and happiness in each round cheek.

She stopped, dead short, as her eyes

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fell upon her husband: "Oh!" she said, "I forgot to order his cutlets!"

She pushed her bicycle hurriedly towards him. "You poor darling, sweet, old boy! I *absolutely* forgot your cutlets," she cried to him.

Eglamore pulled his mouth awry in a grimace that was meant for a smile. "I needn't ask where you've been," he said, with a glance at the lilies, which, besides being in her hands and in Captain Sands' buttonhole, were tied in large bunches to both machines; the warm air was full of their fragrance. "I will only ask why you didn't get in to lunch."

As Captain Sands detailed the series of misfortunes which had detained them, she, laughing all the while, detailed them too. She thanked her escort enthusiastically, as he turned back, for her delightful morning. "Wasn't it sweet of him

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to get leave for the West Woods and to take me this morning?" she asked of her husband as they two went on alone.

"Very sweet," he said. "As it happens I also got leave and was going to propose to take you this afternoon."

The calamity of it was in his voice. Juliet's heart reproached her. "You dear, dear boy! But of course we will go still," she said.

"Of course we will do nothing of the sort."

"But I should so love to go with you."

"You should have waited."

He took her bicycle and pushed it towards the shed which was its home, she following, filled with compunction, and saying with unwearied repetition and in a variety of tones: "If I had only known — oh, Clarence, if only I had known!"

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The bicycle was a new one ; when he had mounted it on its stand he went over it with much interest, examining its various wounds.

"If we don't go to the West Woods we will go somewhere," Juliet said to him as he slowly turned the wheel, "Where shall we go, Clarence?"

He rose up from the bicycle and faced her. "We will go nowhere," he said.

She started back from him. "How horribly you say it! Why are you so disgustingly cross? You said you couldn't take me there ; how could I tell you meant to all the time?"

"You might have known I should do anything in reason you wished."

"But Captain Sands asked me. I had to go with him."

"And you went. There is nothing more to say about it."

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"Where are you going, Clarence?"

"To the office. Where else?"

"You aren't really angry with me?"

"Of course not. I come home, having done everything you asked me, expecting to find my wife waiting for me, lunch ready for me. If you had chosen to take yourself off, you might at least have seen I had something to eat."

"Oh, isn't it mean of you, Clarence, to throw it in my teeth after I'd said to you how sorry I was about the cutlets! You *are* angry. Don't deny it."

"Not at all. Gratified—flattered."

"You don't care a bit about not having any lunch. You are jealous. Jealous of that old Captain Sands—older than my father. Well, I should be ashamed! You are jealous."

"Don't say that again!" he said. He turned back upon her, caught her by the

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shoulders, and bent his face quite close to hers. His lower jaw had come out and his eyes were angry.

Juliet's eyes met them without flinching. "You are jealous," she said again. "Oh, how ugly you look! Jealous—jealous!"

He shook her slightly. "I? Of that frump? That painted woman-man?"

"Yes," said Juliet, hardily; "you are."

He snorted in an anguish of scorn, and pushed her away. "Have it as you like," he said. He walked to the gate, she following, then turned upon her again. "I have explained to you," he said, with an air of wearily seeking for patience, "that this silly ass—this Sands—chooses to be talked of, now with this woman, now that—whoever is fool enough to give him the chance; and I have asked you to keep clear of him, because I don't choose my wife to be made conspicuous

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in that way. It was through a sense of decency I asked you ; but if it is more agreeable to your vanity to call it *jealousy*, you can do so."

"The postman is coming past. I can't quarrel with you against the gate, Clarence. Come indoors to quarrel."

"I will do no such thing."

"Come indoors to make it up, then."

"I am due at the office," he said with dignity ; and went there.

The gate, as it clanged behind her husband, seemed to Juliet to shut upon all the joy of life. Never, never before had Clarence left her for one half-hour without an embrace !

In the tiny hall the cook awaited her with the expression of alert complacency that servants wear when things have gone amiss : "If you please, 'm, the butcher never so much as brought the lessest

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cutlet ; and the master he have gone back to his office without a morsel of food inside him."

Juliet had to acknowledge she had forgotten the cutlets and abase herself before her domestic. For, it seemed, there having been no provision made for the kitchen dinner, the servants also had gone without their meal, or said so. The poor mistress made what apology she could, and bestowed upon cook and Harriet the chocolate she had brought home with her, and all the expensive cakes and biscuits with which Mrs Cummin had stocked the house. After which she went up to her own room and cried with a sickening sense of disappointment and failure.

Eglamore usually managed to spend an hour or more with his wife before their dinner, but to-day he came in half-an-hour

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late for the meal. Juliet, to make up for his lost lunch, had sent Harriet up to town to purchase salmon, at a ruinous price, out of her own pocket-money, and strawberries, at a shilling a dozen, for dessert. She had put on her prettiest dress—that one she had worn the evening Clarence had told her she was far and away the best dressed and prettiest girl in Hale; she had clothed herself in humility, besides, meaning to ask him to forgive her in a manner so charming that he could not resist.

As well as the salmon, the effect of all was spoilt.

She imagined all possible kinds of disaster; he had fallen from his bicycle in a fit; he had been run over by a motor in the High Street; a clerk had gone mad and shot him through the heart as he sat at his office table. When at length

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he came, a whole man, and quite unapologetic, she did well to be angry.

“Where on earth have you been?”

“I went in and had tea with the Plains. Susy and I had a game of croquet. It took longer than I expected.”

“I hate the sight of you,” Juliet said.

CHAPTER X

JULIET'S REVENGE

TWO months had elapsed since the Eglamores had passed through "the picturesque gateway of marriage" to enter upon the homelands of domesticity. The "commonplace estate," Eglamore had heard it called, but his own experience inclined him to pronounce the term a misnomer. During those first weeks of their life together he and his wife found themselves alternating between the height of a happiness so sweet and holy as to bring tears to the eyes, and the depths of a misery where they must laugh with scorn at the futility of their former hopes and at the illusions of wedded bliss. It

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was quite usual for them to ascend those altitudes, to sink to those profundities, in the space of a few hours. The same sun that saw Juliet on her husband's knee, her lips now lightly brushing his throat, now breathing at his ear the fact that she adored him, that no girl on earth had ever possessed such a perfect husband as he, saw her facing him with angry sobs, declaring, had she ever guessed what a hard, ferocious monster he was, wild horses could never have dragged her to marry him.

But, used as they were to such changing moods, they had not yet discovered there was no finality about them. Each time they parted with aching hearts in anger they thought that the end had come, that never could they hope to know happiness again. Each time that Eglamore assured his wife with low-voiced intensity that

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she was more to him than all the world—than a thousand worlds—that without her life would be to him impossible, it seemed to both that now, at last, an understanding never to be interrupted had been established.

Although to those who knew them it was eight weeks since they married, and they were bride and bridegroom still, to them it seemed there never could have been a time when each had not belonged to each. Yet by their perversity in taking themselves and one another seriously they showed themselves veritable tyros at the business of matrimony still.

One frequent cause of the attitude which earned Eglamore the title of monster, the chief inducement to Juliet's tears, were the letters of Mrs Cummin. Her life was a blank to her without her daughter. "What interest in life have

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your father and I without our child? Come back to us for a time," they frequently ran.

Eglamore read such effusions with hard eyes, having decided long ago that the less Juliet saw of her mother the better. That they could be kept apart for always he knew to be impossible, but let it be till he had acquired the influence over his wife for which he still hopefully strove.

He could not spare the time to accompany Juliet to Birmingham, he could not spare her from his side to go alone—decisions Juliet received now with tears, now with outbursts of fiery, childish anger.

"Let your mother come here," Eglamore always said.

"You know very well while those disgusting portraits remain on the wall she can never come. She has vowed she never will."

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"I can't help your mother's absurd vows. And I'd rather you did not call the portraits of my father and mother 'disgusting.'"

"While they are on the wall they are an insult to my dear mother who took them down."

"Merciful powers! Are we to go through that childish nonsense again?"

Whereupon Juliet would fling herself on his neck and kiss him, calling herself a wretch to tease him, or she would hurl at him a "Yes. Always! Always! And never will I forgive or forget your cruelty to my dear mother."

At last there was a morning when Eglamore, yielding to a weakness he knew he would repent, promised to take his wife for a week to her father's house. He received payment for the indulgence in the sight of joyful eyes and glad smiles,

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in the receipt of many kisses. She had sung in her bath, romped through her dressing, had appeared at breakfast a joy incarnate, too blissful to remember the decorum which should have kept her opposite him at table, too happy to eat. The stupid misunderstanding between husband and mother was going to be put right—she knew Mrs Cummin in her own house would be hospitable and kind, she knew her husband would be upon his good behaviour—once more her home would be open to her mother.

“I will write this very day,” she told herself, not saying it to her husband, however, to whom the prospect of their stay was not so delightful.

To him she chatted of a little dinner they were to give that evening to which she had not greatly looked forward. Only the Plains, and Uncle Isaac, and a

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not too interesting bachelor friend of Clarence were coming. She had grumbled at the bother of arranging the stupid dinner, had reminded Clarence that her mother had said they must never venture to ask anyone to dine with their present servants, had yawned in prospect over the hours she would have to sit at Clarence's elbow to watch him play Bridge. But now she would make the dinner a success ; everything should go off well.

"I know I can arrange flowers better than Susy, who hasn't an ounce of taste," she said ; "and if you notice anything wrong with the waiting go on as if you didn't, Clarence, that's a sweet boy. It was because you made her jump so by saying 'Closer, please' that Harriet spilt the lobster sauce last time. I'll try to think up something to shout to Uncle Isaac, so that he doesn't tell Susy again

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I've nothing to say for myself—he did indeed, Clarence—old wretch!—Susy told me so—and you'll see everything will go off beautifully.”

Then he had given her seven shillings extra housekeeping money to help her with the dessert, and she had held him by his coat collar to confess that it had been through her stupidity that the butcher's bill had been too enormous to be paid lately. And he had declared that he was not angry, nor had ever been; that she was the best housekeeper in the world, and the dearest girl; that never—no not even last night, when she had been so vexed with him that she had thrown the wet sponge at him while he was brushing his hair—had he done anything but love her with all his strength.

After which he had gone; and by the midday post a letter had come from Mrs

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Cummin which dispelled at a stroke all that felicity.

"At length," she wrote, "I have got to the bottom of a mystery which has puzzled me for the last month. Your father, once or twice in the course of our married life, has endeavoured to keep a secret from me, always to be compelled ignominiously to divulge it at last. This is one case more. I told you I felt there was more than met the eye in the circumstance of my being recalled here, just when I was being of infinite use and comfort to you. I now write to say that my suspicions were correct, as usual. I will say no more. Not for worlds would I render you unhappy, or make mischief between you and Clarence. Just say to him, however, that in trusting to the discretion of your father he trusted to a rotten reed. Tell him that if he did not

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think Hale big enough to contain at the same time him and his wife's mother he might have resorted to less *underhand* means to be rid of her."

When Eglamore came home that evening Juliet put her mother's letter into his hand. "I want you to tell me what it means," she said.

He glanced at the closely written page and pushed it away. "Another time will do," he said, "I've to see to the wine, and change; and there's only half-an-hour."

"No," said Juliet; "read it now."

She watched him as he obeyed her, and knew, by the way his face altered from an irritated indifference to an irritated attention the moment when he caught the drift of the letter. He tried to push it into her hand when read, and, she resisting, threw it on the floor.

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"Clarence, what does my mother mean?" she asked."

"It isn't my business to decipher your mother's meaning," he said. "Do you want any sherry up as well as hock? And have you remembered to implore of Harriet not to fill the claret glasses with Madeira?"

"What have you and father done in secret? And why does my mother send that message to you?"

"My dear, I can't possibly be bothered now to say."

He walked to the door, but she put herself before it. "You don't go till you tell me," she said.

He looked at the slight figure braced before him, and snorted contemptuously. "I shall have to take a finger and thumb and move you out of the way," he said.

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"If you touch me I will scream. Now tell me."

"What in Heaven's name do you want me to say?"

"Had you anything to do with father's sending for mother home, that time the telegram came? Speak the truth. Don't dare to deceive me. If you tell only the tiniest, tiniest one I shall know!"

"I asked your father to send for Mrs Cummin. Yes."

"Why?"

"I thought she had been here long enough."

"How dare you!"

"I dare do more than that, my dear girl. Now move out of the way, will you? You aren't dressed; no more am I. We haven't time for any heroics. Put them off till to-morrow morning and get away from the door."

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He had, more than once, removed her from that position when she had barred the way ; had been said to hurt her in the process, had won forgiveness with kisses. He thought he knew the game quite well, and was unpleasantly aware of an innovation when, without a word, she relinquished her post and went out before him.

Juliet got herself hurriedly into the frock she wore every evening, rejecting the more elaborate dress she had intended to wear. She heard her husband, who had duly broached the wines for dinner, moving about in his dressing-room as he changed his clothes. The door between them was ajar but no word was spoken. Not waiting to rearrange her hair, to put a chain about her throat or a bracelet on her arm—not waiting to *think*—she ran down into the dining-room.

The table was looking very pretty

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with its dainty burden of cut glass and silver; tiny crimson roses from the Rambler over the door stood in their clear vases on the white satin centre-piece bordered with heavy gold, which had been among her wedding presents. She did not glance at the agreeable effect, however, but straight before her at the niches on either side of the fireplace. The portraits therein "came out and hit you in the eye," Captain Sands had said. Juliet in her happier moods always remembered to avoid the encounter. Now she walked swiftly round the table, mounted a chair, pulled down this portrait, carried the chair to the other recess, pulled down that; hung in their places the highly varnished pictures of "The Cavalier's Favourites" and "Dignity and Impudence," so charmingly copied by Cousin Anna.

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Then, having laid the obnoxious portraits one above the other on the floor, she took a knife from the table and with it ripped the canvases from top to bottom, and again from side to side.

Her face was as red as the roses on the table as she flung the knife among them, caught up a picture in either hand, and ran upstairs to the dressing-room.

Eglamore was hitting the back of his head with a brush in each hand as she came in. He turned inquiringly as he heard the hurried *swish* of her dress over the floor. She stood before him, the portraits in her hands.

"You have behaved abominably to my parents; I wish to show you what I think of yours," she said, and laid the portraits at his feet.

He looked attentively at them as they lay there, the brushes still in his hands, and

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then attentively at her standing before him, her breath coming unevenly now, a look of fear beginning to mingle with the look of daring in her eyes. Then he turned on his heel and went on brushing his hair before the glass again.

The door bell rang ; Juliet knew that her guests had arrived.

CHAPTER XI

A VAIN REGRET

IT seemed to Juliet that even Harriet knew her mistress was in disgrace and was being punished. Even Harriet was on Clarence's side. She perceived it by the confiding way she whispered a reply to a question he asked as to the wine she was pouring, by her anxious attention to his plate. They were all on Clarence's side; and she was a naughty girl, put in the corner in disgrace.

Susy and Mrs Plain, of course, talked to Clarence — Susy knew better at all times than to talk to a woman when a man was handy, she often declared; the middle-aged bachelor-doctor, to whom

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Juliet had an especial dislike because her husband had once gone without her to a Bridge party at his house, only made a pretence of listening when she spoke. Uncle Isaac knew her so well now that he quite frankly ignored her. Clarence, opposite her, avoided, without apparent effort, the eyes she could not keep from his face.

If he had seemed angry, her spirit would have risen; hurt, she would only have longed to beg him to forgive her; but this dreadful indifference, quite new in his treatment of her, filled her at once with a passionate rebellion and a misery she had not known before.

Susy had on a new evening blouse of a vivid pink. Temporary solace to her overwrought feelings Juliet derived from the conviction that Miss Plain looked hideous in the trying tint; but while she

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looked Susy's face would break into its ear-to-ear smile, or the hearty good-fellow laughter for which she was renowned would burst from her lips, and she knew that Clarence, with responsive smile or laugh, was saying to himself what a good sort Susy was. Uncle Isaac, who took a pleasure in making Juliet repeat three or four times her least remark, which he then never troubled to answer, could always hear Susy's jolly tones, always chuckled in his horrible, senile way over her obvious jokes.

"How I hate them all!" Juliet said. "And Clarence too. Yes; Clarence worst of all."

She fixed a look on him which should have curdled his blood, conveying to him the awful intelligence that she hated him. He was listening to a tale Susy was telling him, his eyes strayed momentarily

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to the neglected object at the opposite end of the table, came back to Susy as if his wife did not exist, and he laughed heartily at the conclusion of the tale.

"Hallo!" Uncle Isaac said. He was placed on the side of the table next the door, and, therefore, facing the recesses, and his eyes were caught by the brilliant colouring of Cousin Anna's pictures flaunting there. "Hallo! been picture-dealing, Clarence?"

Mrs Plain, seated beside him, gazed too. Susy, in her creaking pink silk, turned round to look, then sent a swift glance to Juliet's crimson cheeks and flashed a look of intelligence from her twinkling eyeglasses at her mother.

"Those works of art," Clarence said, speaking with his chin thrust out and his teeth not sufficiently opened, as his habit was when annoyed, "are by my

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wife's cousin, and were presented to her on her marriage."

"Eh? Oh, that's all right," Isaac said. "I was afraid someone had got hold of you." He looked at the pictures attentively through his glasses. "Handsome frames!" he said. "And what have you done with the portraits of my brother and sister-in-law?"

"They are, at the present moment, in my dressing-room," Clarence told him, through his teeth.

His uncle continued to stare at the usurping pictures. "I should bring them back, and put these in your dressing-room, my dear boy," he said.

"I thank you," Clarence grimly replied, "but I do not want them there."

"Your portraits are by Madden, aren't they?" the silent doctor asked.

Clarence nodded. "By Madden be-

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fore he was famous—in his earlier manner.”

“What does that matter? All the better,” Uncle Isaac cried. “A man was telling me the other day that Madden, who used to be knocking about here, glad to do a portrait for a five-pound note, was getting as many hundreds for one before he died. He said anyone having a specimen of his early work was lucky—there was no telling how valuable it might be. I thought of these portraits of yours, Clarence.”

“The Bretts,” the doctor broke in, “were showing me a picture done by him of an aunt, or something—mighty ugly I thought it—and bragging that they had just been offered a hundred and fifty for it, but would not sell it for three times as much.”

Eglamore gave his snort. “The Bretts

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had better sell their aunt and pay their bills!" he said.

"Well, as these portraits, which I'm sure I never noticed, are so mighty valuable I should like to see them," Mrs Plain said.

"May we be permitted, sir, to go into your dressing-room and have a look at them?" Susy archly asked.

"No," Clarence said, making the refusal with a careful smile. "No; you mayn't, Susy. Let me catch you in my dressing-room!"

"Have the pictures brought in, Clarence; I should like to see them too," Isaac Eglamore suggested.

"No," Clarence said again. "See them some other day."

"Can't we see them now?" the old man persisted, who was not used to be denied. He turned to Juliet. "May I

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ring and tell your servant to fetch them?" he asked.

Juliet rose to her feet, her face was quite pale. "I will fetch them myself," she said. She felt a desperate anxiety to pull the house about her head quickly, and have done with it.

"No," Clarence said once more. His voice was quiet, but as authoritative as though he had thundered the prohibition. Juliet looked at him, breathless, frightened, grateful. For the moment his eyes held hers; then he turned to his uncle.

"The portraits may have money value or may not," he said, "the fact does not make them more or less valuable to me. They are always to me the portraits of my father and mother—I don't care to have them discussed as articles of commerce."

He opened the door for the women,

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who had risen with Juliet, and who were passing out as he finished speaking.

"Well done, Clarence!" Mrs Plain said, with a fat approving laugh, and an internal ejaculation to the effect that she hoped the young man was not turning into a prig.

"Spoken like a book! Good boy!" Susy declared derisively, and patted him on the arm as she passed.

Juliet followed, with knees that shook under her, and a drooping back, not daring to glance at the unsmiling Egla-more, who, without lingering to look after her as his custom had ever been, sharply shut the door upon her retreating form. She would have liked to have clung about his neck and thanked him for saving her, or to have assured him she was not in the least ashamed of what she had done, and for her part would

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have liked to fetch the portraits, and bang the heads of Uncle Isaac and the rest with them. As it was she had to follow the jovial Susy in her successful blouse, and her admiring fat mother to the tot of a drawing-room; to apologise to them for its stuffiness, and for the coffee which cook was pleased, on that occasion, to serve cold; to endeavour to show them by a liveliness not too well assumed, that all was well; knowing at the same time they were far too clever and too well posted in the history of their neighbours to believe it.

When the men, minus the doctor, who left after dinner, came into the drawing-room, and the Bridge, upon which all their hearts were fixed, was started, Juliet, stealing softly from the room, crept with failing heart to her husband's dressing-room.

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Both portraits were as she had placed them on the floor. Now that the mischief was beyond repair she looked at them with new eyes. They were no longer only the ugly daubs which had caused a rupture between her husband and mother ; they were the faces Clarence had loved. She went on her hands and knees and knelt above the portrait of his father. The face, which was rather like that of the man's brother than his son's, had yet something of that forward set of the jaw so characteristic of Clarence. She remembered to have heard how he had ruled his household with a firm hand, been ever sparing of praise, punished unflinchingly. "But I have seen men with indulgent fathers who haven't done so well as I have done, nor have seemed particularly to love the fathers who spoilt them," Clarence had

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said. And he had thanked God for the father that was his.

Still on hands and knees, Juliet crawled to the companion picture, and in turn bent above it.

Here was no beauty, no fashion, no attempt at a youth with difficulty preserved. Only the honest, sensible face, with eyes as tender as Clarence's own when most Juliet cared to meet them, of one who had loved with a mother's unspeakable devotion her only son ; whom Clarence had deeply loved.

"Since I lost her"—the words, forgotten till then, she had heard in the first days of her marriage, came back to her in the very tones in which they had been spoken—"I have felt as if I had no shelter ; as if I had stood open, four square, to all the winds which blew. Till I met you. When you are at your

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sweetest, Juliet, you look at me with her eyes sometimes."

Juliet had not felt complimented. What pretty young girl wants to be compared to a man's elderly mother? But now, alas! across the eyes the cruel knife had gashed. "Oh, Clarence," Juliet sobbed as she contemplated the result of her senseless act. "Oh, Clarence! Clarence! Clarence!"

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When the Bridge was over, and Egla-more had locked the door behind his departing guests and put out the lights, he mounted with a slow and heavy step to his dressing-room. He had lingered over his arrangements downstairs that he might give her time to get to bed, but he found that his wife had not removed a single garment. The pictures were no longer there, but she stood on the

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spot where they had lain, awaiting him. He made a moment's pause as he saw her there.

"Clarence!" she said, and held out her arms.

He looked at her, looked away, crossed the room, and flung open the bedroom door. "Be good enough to go to your own room," he said; "I have nothing to say to you."

He stood inexorably by the open door, and she went towards it. Reaching it, she turned up to him a white, frightened face and put her hand upon his arm. He shook it off with determination.

"Don't do that. It is quite useless," he said.

He looked at her hardly, while tears rained from her eyes.

"You have done an ignorant and a cruel thing," he said. "Rivers of tears

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will not undo it. While I live I will not forgive it."

His last word was said; he shut the door upon her.

CHAPTER XII

THE MASTER SPIRIT

“**T**HERE is just one thing I wish to ask you, and then I won't trouble you to speak again,” Juliet said the next morning, breakfast being over.

They had taken the meal in silence, except for the loud rustling of the paper Clarence turned about a good deal as he read. He looked up from it and across at her—such a goodly young man, he appeared! His brown, short hair still damp from his morning tub, his square face fresh and comely with health; his strong, broad shoulders in his well-made coat; his collar of the shape, and his neck-tie of the shade, she herself had chosen.

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"I am quite ready to hear you," he said. "There is no reason that you should not speak."

"When you said last night you would never forgive me, did you mean it?"

"I did not mean 'never,'" he said with deliberation. "I may change; you may change; what you did may grow in time to be familiar; at anyrate not so hideously strange. A man is a fool to say of anything in this world 'never.'"

"But at present, and for years, perhaps, to come, you are to be like this? For how many years?"

He rose and laid down his folded newspaper. "I do not at present feel like forgiving you," he said.

"Not though you know I cried all night long? Not if I beg—*beg* to be forgiven?"

He moved impatiently. "Oh, what is

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the good of that? You go and do a thing—an unspeakable thing!—and shed a few tears, and—— We will leave it alone! What is it you wished to ask me? I am not so absurd as to pretend we can live together without speaking.”

“Only without love?”

He waved his fingers as if putting away the subject. “What is it you wished to say to me?”

“Only just this: two can play at this game.”

She had cried half through the night, loudly sobbing on the pillow to arouse his pity; failing in that, silently and more miserably to herself, her face hidden. She had been, then, both frightened and remorseful, ready to lie at his feet like a chidden dog if he would but forgive. Finding herself and her grief rejected her mood changed. Her remorse was

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not less, and perhaps the sense of the irrevocableness of what she had done was greater, but she was her mother's daughter and knew that if her heart broke she must meet hard words with hard ones.

He waited for her to go on.

"I mean," she said, trying to keep the quaver out of her voice, "if you don't love me any more, very well; I don't love you."

He held himself unmovedly beneath the blow, and she rushed wildly on in an eager endeavour to make him feel.

"It is quite true. Quite. I thought I loved you when I married you. I daresay I said so—but you were different. You were kind, and gave me things, and always did as I asked you. Mother said we wanted to marry them to know what they are; and she was right. I know what you are now, and I hate you."

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"You've already told me so several times."

"Yes ; only now I mean it. I hate you, and everything you say and—and do. And how you look at me—you're so—so hideous. Yes ; and that snort you give. I hated you last night at dinner. I wanted you to see I did, only you wouldn't look. Susy was grinning at you, showing all her ugly teeth, and you were grinning back. I thought you were frightful—both of you—and you were ! If you had looked at me you would have seen I thought so. And you are frightful now, with your hands in your pockets and your lip stuck out—and I'm glad I've told you—and I mean it."

"Is that all ?" he asked.

She had to wait a moment because of a catching of the breath. "No," she said in a quieter tone ; "there is some-

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thing else. Are you going to keep your promise and to take me home to my mother, or are you not ? ”

“ Most certainly I am not. If I keep in my present mood I will never go into your mother’s house again ; I will never receive her into mine.”

“ Then I shall go without you.”

“ Very well.”

So indifferent was his tone she could hardly believe her ears. The thought of leaving him was to her as the thought of death.

She gasped with the pain of it.

“ I shall go at once.”

“ You must please yourself.”

“ And never, never come back.”

“ If you go without my leave you certainly will not.”

He delivered this ultimatum at the door ; he passed it, and in a few minutes

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she saw him go through the garden on his way to his office.

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If there had not been the necessity of keeping alive until she had written the history of the situation to her mother, Juliet thought she must have died of the aching of her heart. She told with a hurried pen of the destruction of the pictures, of her sorrow for the act, of Clarence's wrath. "How can I live with him if he hates me?" she wrote. "Oh, mother, if you could only come to me—if you only could! I have told him I should leave him, and he doesn't care a bit. But I don't know if I can ever leave him. I don't know what to do."

The letter was almost as incoherent as her thoughts.

Although her heart should break, cook must come for her horrid orders. Clarence

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must be fed. She went into the town as usual for her important purchases—a leg of lamb to be ordered for dinner, a bunch of radishes and a lettuce to be carried home for lunch. As usual, Captain Sands was waiting to escort her. He always waited for her in the High Street, carried her little parcels for her, looked in at the picture post-cards in the fancy shop window with her, bought her chocolates and flowers. Sometimes, now, she would dart down a back way to avoid him, for she was getting tired of his tales and his smirk and his obtrusive attentions. To-day, however, she was too listless to care if he were beside her or not. Since the heavens had fallen and Clarence had ceased to love her, what did it matter who chattered nonsense in her indifferent ears or grimaced in her weary face?

Clarence saw the pair above his office

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blind as they passed. "How I hate that grinning ape!" he said.

He watched them walking in the sunshine on the opposite side of the street; out of the church gate across the way came the clergyman and his wife. They had been holding morning service, and had themselves formed their own congregation. They looked after the pair whom Eglamore watched, turned upon each other a glance, spoke no word. Eglamore knew that in the little gossip-loving town his wife was laughed about as "the Captain's latest." His eyes followed them into the confectioner's shop; he could not help watching till they came out again.

Then Susy came by. Clarence tapped at the window and called her in. She also had seen Juliet and her escort and said so.

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"I don't know what to do about Birmingham," Clarence said. "Juliet is agitating to go. I suppose it is only natural she should want to see her mother. But the mother I can't stand, and that's the truth of it."

"Send her alone," said the practical Susy. "Let her go till she's tired of being there and wants to come back to you."

"Yes," Clarence said, and moodily contemplated the desk before him. "But what's to become of me while she's away?"

"You come to us," Susy advised. "It's a bargain."

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"I'll do more for you than carry your parcels every day," the gallant ex-volunteer Captain was saying in answer to the familiar expostulations.

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"You only say so."

"Try me. Do try me, Mrs Eglamore."

"If I have to go to Birmingham alone will you come as far as Peterborough with me, and get my tickets, and see me change, and look after my luggage?"

"Will I not?"

"Then you must do more. You must come on to Birmingham and stay with my father and mother."

He said he would, but with less enthusiasm. He was not fond of staying away from the precisely ordered comfort of his home, and found time hang on his hands in any town but Hale.

"Thank you," Juliet said. "But I'm not going, you know. I couldn't possibly leave Clarence."

Captain Sands felt that after the expenditure of three and sixpence for her basket of sweets with its smart lilac

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ribbon she should have been more tactful than to make that speech.

"When do you think of going to Birmingham?" her husband asked of her that evening when dinner was over. He saw that she had barely touched her food, that her face was pale. His own dignity, the respect due to his dead parents, required of him that she must be punished, and he intended to do his duty in this particular; but he did not wish to contemplate her pain. Let her, after all, go to her mother for a while—till he could permit himself to take her to his heart again. It would be easiest and best.

"I have several things to think of before I go—and it will be for a long time," Juliet said, with the pathetic quaver in her flute-like voice. "I suppose you meant it when you said I wasn't to come back?"

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"You know I did not mean it. But I think it better you should go for a time. Perhaps, away from me, you may grow to value your home more, and may—may——"

"What? Pray go on."

"Come to your senses."

"Thank you."

She was a tall girl and as a rule very graceful in her movements. Those she made in anger were not natural to her but copied from her mother, who indulged in a certain dreadful jerkiness in springing from her chair at the point where she considered her feelings outraged. Clarence had observed it in her dealings with her husband; he saw it repeated by his wife now.

"I don't suppose you wish to insult me?" she demanded. The tremble in the girlish voice was her own, but the

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dreadful words were a favourite phrase of Mrs Cummin's. "Do you mean to insult me, Clarence?"

"I don't," Clarence made answer in his least conciliatory tone. "But I think it will be better for you to go for a time."

"And for you too, I suppose?"

"That — perhaps," he admitted with admirable indifference.

"And pray—pray—" her quick breathing fluttered her voice—"what will you do while I am away? For be very sure I shall not hurry—not hurry—to come back."

"I shall go and stay with Susy," he said.

She showed that it was a blow. Her face was piteous for a moment. "Wait — wait till you are asked," she gasped.

"I am asked. Susy asked me this afternoon."

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"Very well!" She jerked across the room with her mother's gait to the door. "Then, as it is all arranged so nicely—so very nicely—I can pack my things, and go—go at once."

She shut the door loudly behind her, and he saw her no more till he went to bed.

He nearly fell over her large travelling case as he opened the bedroom door. It was duly strapped, he noticed, and Juliet, fully dressed, was moving about, banging-to drawers and wardrobe doors. Without a word he got into bed and presently was asleep. Juliet put on her hat and the travelling cloak she had worn a month or two ago on their honeymoon. It was a long process. The hat had to come off and on many times before final adjustment. She made more than necessary noise in hunting for her veil, in

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opening and shutting her glove-box. By the time she had finished dressing Clarence's regular breathing had deepened into a slight snore. She stood and looked at him. There was no doubt about it, the heartless fiend was asleep. She lifted the tin travelling case and dropped it into an empty bath.

The noise must have awakened him if he had been the Seven Sleepers rolled into one. His eyes opened instantly and rather alarmedly upon her face.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"To Birmingham—Edgbaston—Marchmont," she told him—"home."

"At this time of night?"

"Yes. Why do you snort? If you knew how much more deadlily I hate you when you snort!"

"There isn't a train. Don't be silly. You'd better undress and come to bed."

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"You will see if I am silly." She clutched with both hands the travelling case and jerked to the door. "I — I wish you good-night," she said.

"Good-night—since you are so silly."

The case banged against the door-posts; she looked back into the room; he had turned on the pillow and was asleep again.

By the sound of the tin case when it dropped, jangling, to the floor, by the ease with which his wife carried it, Eglamore knew that it was empty; he knew, too, that she had no money; he had his own reasons, therefore, for not attaching too much importance to the projected journey.

After a few minutes, however, he got up, made sure the travelling case had journeyed no farther than the boxroom on the landing from whence it had been fetched. There had been a noisy un-

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locking and banging of the front door, but by the draught of cool night air fluttering his pyjamas as he crossed the landing he knew it stood open still. Noiselessly he lifted the sash of the window from whence a view of the doorstep could be obtained. The summer night was light enough to show him Juliet sitting there, huddled, elbows on knees, chin on hands. Three times, during the half hour she maintained that position, he regarded her crouching figure, going back to bed between whiles. Then he fetched a leather collar-box from his dressing-room and sent it bounding down the stairs.

It hit her smartly on the back, and, as she sprang up, bounced into the garden. In an instant she came rushing upstairs: "Clarence, there are thieves in the garden," she cried. "They are

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throwing stones at me—enormous ones—from behind the wall.”

But it was impossible to arouse the sleeping husband; and presently Juliet, having thrown off her clothes, flew into bed beside him and hid her head beneath the sheet.

“You haven’t condescended to ask me why I gave up my intention of going to Birmingham last night,” Juliet inquired of her husband the next morning.

The long borders upon which the French window of the tiny morning-room opened were ablaze with flowers, the air was sweet with the scent of stock and mignonette. About the window the scarlet rambler hung, the clematis sent tendrils to peep upon the foolish pair sitting with glum faces within. “I suppose it is nothing to you that your wife,

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who has been used to carriages and horses and servants to wait on her, has to stumble along at dead of night carrying her own luggage, and pursued by horrible, tipsy thieves, yelling and throwing stones at her?"

"I didn't think the luggage would be too much for you," he told her, "and the tipsy men evidently did you no harm."

She knew by his tone and the dragging of his lip that he had disbelieved in her intention of starting alone at midnight for Birmingham. The fact that, instead of being in an agony of terror for her as she had intended, he had all the time been laughing in his sleeve, filled her with blind anger.

"Because I did not go I suppose you think I am not going?" she cried. "I am. I am going this very day."

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"No; you are not. You are going to-morrow."

"I will go to-day."

"You will wait until to-morrow, when I can go myself as far as Peterborough with you to see you don't make a mistake and get into the wrong train."

"And then you will come back, I suppose, and will go to stay with Susy Plain? That "good old girl," who has set you against me and — and shown herself the—the cat she is."

"I shall stay, while you are away, with Susy, as I have told you."

"Then go to her at once—at once, do you hear? I won't trouble you to come with me. You are not quite the only man in the world—although you think you are—giving yourself airs and looking so—so ridiculous! There is someone who will be very glad to do me a ser-

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vice. He will go with me, and we will go to-day."

"Who will go with you?" he asked, and put aside the mask of indifference.

"Captain Sands. He is the only person in this horrible, horrible place who cares if I live or die. He has promised to go home with me whenever I like; and I shall ask him to go to-day."

With the twitch which would have moved her mother's shoulders in like case she reached the door. There he caught and held her, gripping her arm.

"Until you promise you won't go to Captain Sands on any such errand, you don't stir out of the room," he said.

She looked at him, drawn to her fullest height, her chin lifted: "You think you can stop me? A short — insignificant man—like you?" With a sudden move-

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ment she twisted her arm from him and darted upstairs.

She came down in a couple of minutes, wearing her hat, pulling on her gloves; a girlish, pretty figure, dressed in white. He awaited her on the mat at the foot of the staircase.

"Move away," she said from the elevation of the last few stairs.

"Not till I have your promise."

"You will never have it."

"You intend to ask Sands to go with you to-day to Birmingham?"

"Most certainly I do."

"You shall not."

She laughed excitedly, really enjoying the fact that she had roused him at last. "I will show you if I shall not," she said, and, turning unexpectedly, flew up the stairs.

He followed her three steps at a time,

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and caught her on the little landing, frustrating her plan of making for the backstairs and the kitchen door. Gripping her so that this time she could not escape, he dragged her — the distance was but a few feet—into his dressing-room. She made only a feint of struggling, because she liked to feel how strong he was, and he pulled her easily across the room to the door which led to their bedroom, locked it, put the key in his pocket. He twisted her round sharply then, so that they were face to face.

"Now, are you going to Sands?" he asked.

"Yes. You are hurting my wrists very much. Oh, what a cruel and *beastly* man you are! I shall show the bruises to Captain Sands as we travel up."

"No; you won't," he said. And before

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she knew what he was doing, he had caught her up in his arms, and carried her to the long, empty bath, in which he carefully laid her at full length. Then he quickly left the room, locking that door also upon her.

CHAPTER XIII

THE RESCUE

THE quarrel that ensued between husband and wife, on receipt of their daughter's letter at Marchmont, showed features somewhat differing from that of their previous encounters.

Mrs Cummin had announced her intention of going, at any loss of dignity, at once to her daughter's rescue, and he had forbidden her. She had put his word aside as a something beneath contempt, and with a few scathing words flung in her husband's face, had gone to her room to prepare for her immediate departure. Thither he had unexpectedly followed her. It was seldom that he denied her

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the honour of the last word ; she could hardly remember the time when he had voluntarily sought her presence. Standing before her, and speaking in a tone which was destined to ring in her ears for the rest of her life, he delivered himself of a few curt sentences.

“You are not a bad woman. I give you credit for believing in yourself and your own motives. You act, as you always claim to do, for the best ; I grant it. Yet you have wrought with your tongue and your temper more harm in my life than if you had been a drunkard, or a vicious woman. I don't suppose you will pause in what you are doing now ; I know you too well to expect it. I have thought it my duty, however, to make my protest. Now go and ruin the happiness of our girl's home as you have ruined mine.”

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She did not receive his remarks in silence, and she went, scoffing in her heart; but they stayed with her nevertheless. Across all the more important things she tried to think of came her husband's words, spoken not angrily as he was accustomed to argue with her, but with a force of dispassionate conviction.

What he had said was as absurd as cruel. She had been a perfect wife, mother, housekeeper, instead of being the ruin of his home. Yet he had spoken in the very accents of sincerity: was it not astounding that such a view of her exemplary conduct could be held even by him?

She tried to think, as the train bore her along, of what she should do when she arrived. Juliet had said she wanted her mother; evidently she was unhappy; there had been no question about the

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fashion in which to answer that appeal. If her son-in-law's house had been guarded by lions Mrs Cummin would have gone when Juliet called her. But what exactly to do when she got there she could not determine. She must show Juliet how to score off her husband and come off conqueror, she must teach her that a girl could not be taken from such luxuries as Juliet had known to such a home as Clarence's without suffering from the sacrifice demanded of her. But how could she with dignity enter a house, the dust of whose floors she had shaken from her feet?—There was the difficulty.

“As you have ruined mine—as you have ruined mine—ruin the happiness of your daughter's home—as you have ruined mine.”

The words rang so persistently in her brain she could but take them on her

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own tongue. Ruined his home? How exactly the reverse was the truth. He had been a man of an easy-going temperament. Ten years ago, when he had been younger and much stronger than now, he had wanted to retire from business, thinking, with only one child, he was rich enough. It was she who had kept him with his nose to the grindstone; and in that ten years he had doubled his fortune, and now might be accounted really wealthy. He had been without ambition, loving his book, his pipe, his garden, the society of his little girl. It was her tongue which had lashed him to effort; it was she who had seen to it that his carriages, servants, house, and grounds were such as should elevate him in the opinion of his fellow-men. No one of their acquaintances had such perfect lawns on which to give their garden parties. Never in her life had

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she been to a dinner without recognising, and acting up to, the necessity of giving a better one in return.

As for Juliet. Had she been of the order of mother who feels that her duty to her daughter finished with the office of finding her a school and packing her off to it? She had had her own ideas about girls' schools, at home and abroad, and the evil to be learned there ; her child should be safe under her own eye ; and there she had been kept in spite of the fatigue and the fuss of lessons, of continually changing governesses. When the father, in his thoughtless man's way, would have spoilt the girl, she had prevented his doing so ; never had she relaxed in her watchful care to mould her child in all things as she was moulded herself. As much as was possible with one who had necessarily inherited some

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of her father's weakness, she had made her a duplicate of herself—what more could she have done ?

“Ruin your daughter's happiness as you have ruined mine,” the persistent voice talked on.

The great inconvenience of locking his wife in his dressing-room Clarence found to consist in the fact that he dared not leave her there. However much his office claimed him, his post, while she remained incarcerated, was on the other side of her door.

After the scrambling noise made by her getting out of the bath, and the slight sound of her stealthy testing of the lock of the door, she was very quiet. He fetched his book and pipe, and sat on the top stair of the landing upon which the door opened. He had taken the only course practicable under the circum-

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stances, he did not doubt, and he was determined she should remain shut up until it was desirable to let her out ; but he was, to say the truth, extremely desirous that she should give him the chance of doing so quickly.

He had never smoked a pipe less to his taste ; after the first five minutes he gave up the attempt to read his book.

In five minutes more (by his watch—an age in his experience of anxiety and impatience) he got up and knocked upon the door.

“Juliet,” he called. He had to repeat her name in that sharp tone of authority several times, and to hammer upon the door, before, in a voice of cold and calm self-possession, she answered him.

“Are you tired of being in there?”

“Not at all. I have plenty to think about.”

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"Say that you will not make yourself and me ridiculous by going to Sands and I'll let you out at the moment. Do you hear, Juliet?"

"I hear—perfectly. Thank you."

"Are you going to give me your promise?"

"No."

"Are you going to keep me here all day long?"

"Certainly I have no wish to keep you here."

"I may go to the office?"

"As quickly as you like. You may go anywhere."

"And what will you do?"

"I shall call from the window to the first person I see to come and break open the door."

"Don't be a fool, Juliet. We aren't children to play such a silly game. Say

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the word I want you to say, and come out."

"The game isn't mine. I don't call it a game."

"Juliet, my hand is on the key. One word!"

No answer.

"Am I to go and leave you here?"

No answer. "I am going, then."

She heard his step thumping heavily downstairs. Her durance only began to irk her when she knew that he was gone. The first half hour, while she had known him to be keeping watch, was as nothing, the thirty minutes after he had left her seemed to be of the duration of hours; the fact that she was really a prisoner was intolerable.

The day was hot; the window, a very narrow one, only opening at the top; no bell was in the room. She climbed on

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a chair and looked out of the window. A purple cloud was mounting from the horizon, heavily encroaching on the blue of the sky. Far off, on the otherwise deserted road, a cab was approaching, slowly crawling through dust and heat. Juliet could just see it by laying her cheek on the open frame. There was a sound of distant thunder; not a leaf stirred of the mountain ashes in the hedge by the gate. Within, there seemed to be no breath of air. Suddenly recognising this fact, Juliet felt that she must suffocate.

She sprang from the chair, ran to the door, shook it, loudly called on the servants, happily chattering over their washing up on the other side of the house, and deaf to their mistress's voice. Juliet tore the blouse away from her throat; she felt ill, horribly ill; gasping,

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choking with sobs, she called her husband's name.

Then, with something rising in her throat which threatened indeed to choke her, she fled again to the window, mounted the chair and hung out her head for air.

The cab was before the gate now ; but Juliet was too far gone in hysterical derangement to notice that it had stopped, and that from it a lady was descending. She could only shake the window and scream : " Clarence ! Clarence ! "

The lady came in at the gate, stopped short upon the gravel path at the cry, looked up, aghast, at the window. " Juliet ! What in Heaven's name is the matter ? " she called.

The cry of " Clarence " changed to the cry of " Mother ! Mother ! Mother ! "

" What is it ? Tell me this instant," Mrs Cummin cried in an agonised voice

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of authority. The cabman, who had pushed open the gate, stood with it in his hand, gazing from the mother on the path to the daughter at the casement. "Is anyone *murdering* you?" Mrs Cummin called in a tone of wrathful excitement. "Tell me at once, Juliet."

"He has locked me in," Juliet shrieked. "I can't get out! Oh, Mother! Mother! I can't get——"

Then there was a crashing sound, and the mother, her eyes fixed upon the window, saw her daughter disappear from it.

At the sound of the crashing noise, and of Juliet's fall, Eglamore went flying upstairs, his heart in his mouth. He had fidgeted in the morning-room, which looked out on the back garden, wondering what they were thinking of him at the office, wondering how long it would take

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to weary Juliet to submission, and knew nothing of the arrival of the cab. As he bounded upstairs he was aware of a rustle of silk pursuing him, but in the stress of the moment took no heed. Not until his hand was on the lock, and Mrs Cummin, screaming the name of Juliet, hurled herself at the door, did he perceive that his mother-in-law was upon him.

"I insist on your opening the door," she cried to Eglamore, with unnecessary emphasis, as he was already flinging it wildly open.

The chair Juliet had unfortunately selected to stand on had been one discarded from the bedroom as unsafe ; under the strain put upon it, its hind legs had suddenly separated from the seat, bringing Juliet precipitately to earth.

She had worked herself into a hysterical condition, and she lay and sobbed and

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screamed amid the ruins of the chair. Eglamore tried to lift her, but she fought away from him and flung herself into her mother's arms.

"He shut me up—without air—for hours," she cried. "I couldn't breathe, mother. I was going to jump from the window—when you came."

She probably had forgotten that she could not possibly have squeezed her body through the window, and it was a fact Mrs Cummin naturally overlooked, while Clarence was too concerned at the condition in which he found his wife to point it out. In his preoccupation he was not yet even affected by the consideration that he had put himself in the wrong, and that his was an altogether unenviable position.

"Tell me if you are hurt," he kept saying, white with anxiety. "Is she

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hurt?" he asked of the mother, kneeling beside her prostrate daughter, trying to enfold her in her arms.

He could see that a large piece of skin had been scraped off her forehead, which was bruised ; as she sobbed on she held up and pitifully looked at an arm down the white skin of which a long narrow furrow of crimson showed.

"My wounded darling!" the mother said ; and Juliet cried more piteously as she beheld the wound.

Clarence with a troubled face drew out a pocket-handkerchief and dabbed the blood upon the arm.

"Leave her to me!" his mother-in-law cried fiercely. She seized her daughter's wrist and enveloped it in her own handkerchief. "You have finished your work ; go, and leave my child to me."

At the half-open door stood Harriet,

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faintly knocking, looking in with gloating eyes upon mistress and mistress's mother sprawling upon the floor, and master kneeling above them. "Please, sir, Spinks, the cabman, he's a-waitin," she said.

"Tell him to go, then," Clarence said.

"Tell him to stop!" cried Mrs Cummin, with an outstretched commanding hand.

She turned upon Eglamore, Harriet still lingering within hearing, loth to leave the interesting scene. "I take my daughter back with me to my home to-day," she said.

"I was coming to you, mother," Juliet sobbed; "I was coming when he locked me in. He knows I can't breathe—I suffocate and can't breathe if a door won't open—and he locked me in. Hours!—and it thundered—oh, it was for hours!"

"Darling, don't think of it. Try to

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forget it all. You shall go home with me to-night," Mrs Cummin soothed her.

Clarence held out his hand to his wife. She looked at it and looked away. Her breath still came sobbingly, although there were now no tears. "You wish to leave me?" he asked.

"If she does, or not, she goes!" Mrs Cummin declared. "I trust no child of mine to your tender mercies again, Clarence Eglamore. Had I come two minutes later I should have found the dead body of my daughter dashed to pieces on the garden path. No thanks to you that I was in time. I look upon you as a murderer, let me tell you."

"You may look on me as you like if Juliet sticks to me," he said. "You will not leave me, Juliet?"

He still held out his hand to her, but Juliet turned her head on her mother's

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lap, hiding her face. When a minute had passed he withdrew his hand, got upon his feet, and walked to the door. There he paused and looked at Mrs Cummin.

"I was going to bring my wife to you myself to - morrow," he said. "I locked her up because she insisted on going with Captain Sands instead of with me."

Juliet lifted her head. "I didn't mean it, mother. He knew I didn't mean it. He locked me up because he hates me, and wanted—wanted to k-k-kill me!"

"We will see if there is not a law which will release you from such a monster," the mother said; and Clarence went from the room.

The cab waited while Juliet's wounds were bathed, she dressed for travelling, her luggage hastily packed. Her desire

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to sob and cry left her with her husband ; she sat in heavy silence while the preparations for her departure were made.

Harriet and cook, with alert solemnity, rendered a secretly joyful assistance ; cook even condescending on her own initiative to make the kettle boil, and sending up to the two ladies two cups of tea.

"Not beneath this roof!" Mrs Cummin said when the refreshment was offered ; and Juliet turned from the cheering cup without a word.

"Has your master left for his office?" the elder lady demanded of the servants.

"The coward!" she ejaculated, when informed that he had. "Your husband did well to avoid any last words with me!" she reminded Juliet.

Juliet's hand shook so painfully she could not herself adjust her veil. The

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grazed bruise on her temple showed plainly through it, and on her wounded arm the swathing handkerchief protruded beyond the sleeve of her coat.

"My poor little unhappy darling!" the mother said.

The girl was evidently half dazed. She had to sit while they dressed her. She shook and shivered so that to fasten buttons, to draw on gloves, was a difficult matter. When she must go downstairs her mother led her with an arm about her waist.

Mrs Cummin looked around with in-sucked lips. "He has done well to run away!" she said.

But when they reached the little hall Eglamore came out of the morning-room door and spoke to his wife. "Come in here, and let me say a word to you before you go," he said.

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Juliet shrank closer to her mother, who held her with a reassuring clutch.

"We decline to hold further speech with you," Mrs Cummin said.

"I only wish to speak with my wife. Juliet, come to me."

Juliet felt herself dragged forward by her mother. The servants were listening, the cabman, who had been summoned to help with the luggage, looked on with a discreetly interested eye.

Clarence was acutely aware of the publicity of the scene. To think that his passionate love affair, his idyllic marriage, should end in such a vulgar scandal as this!

He came out of the doorway, and put himself before his wife. "Before you leave you shall tell me this," he said: "Are you going of your own free will, or influenced by your mother? Can it

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possibly be your wish to leave me, Juliet?"

She looked at him a moment and looked away. "You have been cruel to me," she quavered.

"And you honestly wish to leave me?"

Her mother's grip of her arm was painful. "I wish to be with my mother," Juliet said.

Then her husband stood out of her way.

Once away from her home Juliet remained almost absolutely silent. She lay back in the corner of the cab, and later of the railway carriage, with shut eyes, tacitly resisting all Mrs Cummin's efforts to rouse her from her lethargy.

To hear "all about it" was naturally the desire of the mother, who had so far only gathered a vague account of

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the disgraceful affair. But no inducement would open Juliet's mouth on the subject. When at last Mrs Cummin commanded her to speak, she dared to remain silent.

Under even the present distressing circumstances, Mrs Cummin was glad to have her daughter with her. During the long journey homeward, what confidences she had expected the girl to make! with what exquisite sympathy the pair would abuse the monster husband! How they would go over and over again the story!

Disappointed in this expectation, looking upon Juliet's hanging head and obstinately closed lips, the poor lady was fain to take refuge from her defeated hopes in the thought of her husband. Even he, who so rarely saw things from her point of view, must approve the step she had taken to-day, must praise her

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for her prompt action, and her courage in bringing Juliet away. There was no doubt of his love for his daughter; it would be easy to rouse his anger against the man who had ill-treated her.

As for the last twenty years Mrs Cummin had not longed for her husband, she longed for him now. With the dramatic power she undoubtedly possessed, she would tell him all the story; she could trust herself it should lose nothing in her handling.

Reaching home, she would put Juliet to bed — she did not doubt that her curiously apathetic bearing was the result of suffering; she would be better when induced to speak of her wrongs — then she would go to find her husband, who, before turning in for the night, would be smoking the pipe he enjoyed on a certain seat beneath the yew-tree on the lawn.

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He would see at once that she required comfort and support. How many years it was since she had appealed to him for either! But she remembered that in the long ago there had been once or twice such an occasion, and that he had not failed her. The strain upon her will and nerve had been great, and this curious sullenness of Juliet's was trying; it was possible she might even break down and cry as he praised her. But the relief of those tears, the comfort of her husband's approbation would be great.

When at last they were driven beneath the stars, to the dear home she had left a few weeks ago, laughing on her husband's arm, Juliet roused herself. She put her head through the carriage window, and looked towards that chair beneath the yew-tree, which was also in Mrs Cummin's thoughts. She hoped to

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see the light of her father's cigar shining through the soft dusk.

"Where is father?" she asked. "I want to see my father very badly."

But Mrs Cummin persisted in her plan of sparing Juliet all further fatigue and putting her to bed at once.

She saw to her undressing, and most tenderly cared for the girl, tucking her in bed as when she had been a child, and fetching with her own hands the soup she deemed it expedient she should drink before she slept. Juliet drank obediently, but refused afterwards to lie upon her pillow.

"Not till I have seen my father," she said. "I wish to tell my father myself, mother."

She sat up in bed, her dark hair, loose upon her shoulders, giving to her round face an unusually childish look, and with

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eager eyes she watched the door. It was not only that she wanted to see her father, she wanted to see him alone—just for one minute alone, without her mother. Just to say one word to him who would understand.

The door opened: "Father!" she called.

But it was her mother who came in; her mother alone, with a drawn face. She came to the bedside and looked at Juliet, who saw in the moment that she could not speak, and that in her shaking hand she held a piece of note-paper, on which some words were written in Juliet's father's writing.

"Your father is not here," she said at length. "Your father has left me. He is not coming back."

CHAPTER XIV

THE MIGHTY FALLEN

THE letter her father had written Juliet in explanation of his conduct in turning his back on his home was redirected on to her from Hale in her husband's hand.

In writing it Mr Cummin had believed that she, who was so happy in the love of a good fellow like Clarence Eglamore, would find comfort for any sorrow it caused. Perhaps if she had read it under the conditions imagined she would have borne up against the sorrow and the shame of it. As it was she felt herself to be overwhelmed.

The letter was long; the writer had

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given thought to its composition, striving not so much to justify himself to his daughter as to make on her a certain impression. His little daughter had been in such a hurry to leave him, he wrote, and since she had gone from his home he had found life there, alone with her mother, intolerable.

"I know what your mother is to you," he went on. "I don't want to bear hardly on her; I would not have her in your eyes less dear. I will take care that she is liberally supplied with means; the carriages, the servants, the pocket-money for which she has pestered me, she can have to pretty nearly the same extent as before. I shall only reserve a small part of my income—she has always made me live up to the full amount of it—to myself. I shall be a lonely man, Juliet; but at least I shall have peace, and be rid of the bitter-

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ness which for years has been growing in my heart—not naturally bitter, you know, my dear little girl, at all. Only my lawyer will know my address, and to his care you can send the letters to which I need not tell you how much I shall look forward.

“You love your husband, Juliet, I know. Don’t let anyone come between you. Don’t be afraid of not always having your own way. It is best for both of you, believe me, that Clarence should generally have his. Be kind, be gentle, be yielding, my dear. It is for these qualities men love women. Don’t fight and struggle for the mastery. When you’ve got it and your husband is conquered — shamed, perhaps, in his own eyes and those of his household — what better off are you? You’ve triumphed at the expense of what made you adorable in his eyes.

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"And don't be always striving to squeeze an extra indulgence from him which he knows he can't afford. Is there anything under heaven he can buy you worth the fact that for every concession, wrung from him with badgering, bickering, or sulks, he loves you less, gets to hate to be alone with you, loathes instead of loves the sound of your voice?"

There was more to follow, but when Juliet had read so far, her tears falling heavily upon it, her mother put out her hand for the letter. Slowly and attentively, even going through some portions twice, she read it; then gave it back without a word.

Later, "You had a letter from Clarence this morning?" Mrs Cummin said; and Juliet passed on that letter also.

"Burn it, mother, please," the girl

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said; "I don't wish to see it—ever—again."

"DEAR JULIET," this letter ran,—“As you have seen fit to leave our home, I have closed The Cottage. Should you wish to communicate with me a letter to the office will always find me.—Yours,

“CLARENCE.”

That epistle also Mrs Cummin read without comment. Indeed her tongue seemed to have lost its cunning in those days. She was strangely silent.

To have Juliet to herself, no one to come between, to be undisputed sovereign of her own domain—might she not have been thought to possess here the constituents of bliss? But by some strange perversity of human nature, some curious caprice of the spirit, it followed that, holding these blessings at last in her hand, the capacity to enjoy them failed her. Even

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for her daughter's society, it seemed, she no longer greatly cared ; often she shunned Juliet's doleful companionship to sit alone by preference, gazing upon the rooms she had so sumptuously furnished or the grounds she had kept in such immaculate order. From the house she could not be induced to stir. All callers she refused to see.

The family of Tolworths, returned from their visit to Florence, were ushered unexpectedly into the room where she sat, one day. Without any greeting of them she rose from her chair and went from the room. Juliet was not visible. The discomfited family, bursting with gush about their delightful tour, waited for a quarter of an hour to see if the mistress of the house intended to return, then abashedly took their departure. The news that Mr Cummin had run away from

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his wife had been public property; after the call of the Tolworths the fact that Mrs Cummin's reason had given way beneath the blow was widely reported.

Those who saw her daily—her daughter, her lawyer, her servants—knew that her brain was as strong as ever; that it was her pride which was broken.

What was to her her fine house now that she would receive none within its walls to jeer at her loneliness; what mattered how many horses were in the stables since she would not go abroad in her well-known carriage to be pointed at with the finger of scorn? How could she rejoice any more in her handsome dresses and her well-preserved looks, when all who looked at her knew that in her husband's eyes she was hateful?

She had been a woman used to flare into passion tempestuously, never one to

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brood over what was amiss. Now she brooded. She did not sleep o' nights, she had no joy in her days ; and presently she fell ill.

When only partially recovered it was decided that it would be well for her to travel, and who but Juliet could go with her?

"Let her mix with strangers, divert her mind," the doctor said ; but Mrs Cummin shrank from strangers at Mentone and at Nice as she had done from her friends in Birmingham. She would not appear at *table-d'hôte*, nor show her face in any frequented way, but sat in her bedroom always, and looked out on mountain, sea, or lake as she had looked out on the garden at home, and with the same hopeless apathy.

One night Juliet, helping her to bed, watched her gait as she crossed the room.

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"You are not lame, mother?" she asked anxiously. "What makes you drag that foot so?"

Her mother looked at her in silence, then down at the foot, as if a little surprised herself to find it not so brisk as of yore. So often she omitted to answer questions now; she did not answer this. But later, when the girl stooped to kiss her before going to her own bed, Mrs Cummin held her with a hand upon her arm.

"Juliet—" she waited long on the word, holding the girl, looking into space, "I think you had better send for your husband," she said at last.

Juliet, falling asleep that night, with wet eyes but a joyful heart, dreamed that she and Clarence were walking, hand in hand, down the sunny gravel path of the garden at home between the borders gay with flowers. It was the

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time of summer, evidently, by the luxuriousness of the flowers, but the apple-trees of the orchard beyond were all in full bloom, and the lilac bushes. Her mother too was there, coming to meet them down the path, and in her face were the roses of health and happiness.

"Mother! mother!" Juliet dreamed she called joyfully to her, "I can't think why I have been so unhappy. Here is Clarence, mother; and he loves me just the same!"

Then she awoke and knew it was because she was to send for Clarence she had had that happy dream.

But when, later in the morning, she went into her mother's room to ask her why she was so late in stirring, she found it was because one arm and leg and side of the poor mother refused to stir at all. Mrs Cummin was paralysed.

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When she had to a certain extent recovered from the first seizure, and could speak, although with difficulty, "Have you sent for Clarence?" she asked.

Juliet told her, weeping, that she had not; that she wanted no one but her mother now, not even her husband.

The dying woman looked at her, her face awry altered almost past recognition, but in her eyes still the undying anxiousness of the mother.

"Go to him," she said. "Don't mind me. I'm all right" — ("or righ'," she said; her words were clipped and stammered forth like those of a drunken man, but her tardy effort at self-effacement was not the less pathetic) — "I'm or righ'. Go er Claren."

In the night she had another seizure; and before the night of the next day was dead.

CHAPTER XV

A SWASHING BLOW

CLARENCE EGLAMORE, fleeing from the haunting presence of his wife in the house which no longer held her, and all the memories, painful or full of bliss, but all now equally sad, of his two months' sojourn there, took up his abode beneath the hospitable roof of Susy Plain and her mother.

There—daily expecting the letter of contrition which he knew, sooner or later, Juliet would write, determined, for the sake of their future relations, to let the first advance towards reconciliation come from her—he waited, wearying for that which never came. Nothing of the

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flight from his redoubtable wife of Mr Cummin he knew ; nothing of Mrs Cummin's illness ; of the miserable setting forth of her and Juliet in search of health—nothing.

He had escaped from the loneliness of the cottage, dreading the regrets which would assail him there ; but a short residence with the always genial Susy, of Cuckoo Hall, inclined him to wish he had remained with his wounded loves and broken hopes in the home he had deserted. She was always in such a jovial frame of mind, her voice so loud, her laugh so ready and boisterous ; such a bracing person, altogether—for a half-hour at a time. Taken in large doses the tonic failed strangely of its effect ; and Clarence found that on some moods of his this determinedly cheerful mood of hers jarred painfully.

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There were hours in which he could not endure to hear Juliet's name mentioned; there were hours in which it seemed to him a cruelty to speak of aught else. At all times he was so on edge that the name must be spoken with bated breath. To his own heart he might accuse his wife; of the rest of the world he expected that she should be handled as a holy thing. Neither Susy nor her mother could be bothered with such niceties.

"The girl has behaved like an idiot," Susy said in her downright, sensible way to anyone who would listen. "I'm not going to make any bones about it."

"She was always a fool, to my thinking," Isaac Eglamore would say. "Instead of mooning about with that face of his Clarence should thank God to be rid of her."

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Susy often talked to Uncle Isaac in those days. The domestic affairs of the junior partner offered a never-failing theme. She would run into his private room at the office, sometimes, if she had anything of interest to communicate. Or he, in the hour he permitted himself for lunch, would walk across and take his biscuit and sherry with Miss Plain and her mother, instead of eating it alone in the office. The elder Eglamore, who, in spite of his sixty-six years and his partial deafness, had kept his figure and a certain juvenility of deportment, became quite gay in those days of his closer association with Susy; would snigger loudly in response to Miss Plain's great laugh, would pay broad compliments to her mother. So that the two ladies joked each other about him with much entertainment, and declared on all sides

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what an amusing old dear he was, and what a fool Juliet had been, seeing how large was his fortune, not to humour him more.

Captain Sands absented himself from Cuckoo Hall at that time. He chose to give himself airs as having been the cause of the quarrel between husband and wife, and made a point of openly shunning Eglamore in consequence. But he strutted up and down the High Street with more satisfaction than ever, and got a good bit of credit out of the affair of which everyone talked.

He was not so glib with his pen as his tongue, but he managed to compose quite a lengthy epistle for the benefit of Juliet. It told her the news of Hale—little items he tactfully said, which Eglamore, whose letters must be filled with more important matter, might overlook.

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From this source Juliet learnt the interesting fact that Susy and Clarence played a single at croquet every day after lunch, and that Susy invariably beat. That Uncle Isaac, who had worn a black suit all his life, had suddenly appeared in a pale grey one. That the fat young lady in the confectioner's shop had inquired after young Mrs Eglamore of Captain Sands; had said she had missed seeing her pass the window, and remarked on the fact that she always wore pretty hats. The fat young lady was not the only person in Hale who missed Mrs Eglamore and admired her hats, the writer took the opportunity to remark. He also inquired if the invitation to Marchmont Mrs Cummin had been good enough to give him still held good. He went about with an added importance for a few days, mentioning that he was thinking of taking

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a holiday shortly, and would probably spend it in Warwickshire ; striving by such means to sustain the public interest in what had been the most eventful flirtation of his life. But no reply came from Juliet, and the visit to Warwickshire never came off.

Three weeks of feeling himself a not too welcome visitor at the Plains' house—for all his preoccupation he was sensible of the fact that his glum face, his silent mood, his reserve on affairs which they wished openly to discuss, were obnoxious to his hostesses ; three weeks of saying to himself : "It is she who must give in—not I. If I am weak now, I am weak always ; a second Cummin, poor fellow, and Juliet her mother over again" ; three weeks of anxiously watching the post which never brought to him the word he longed to see. Then Eglamore sent

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for Harriet and cook to resume their duties at The Cottage.

"I will go back and get ready for Juliet," he said to Susy, with whom, as with the rest of the world, he had tried to maintain the fiction that all was well between him and his wife, and that he expected her early return.

Susy smiled as broadly over the departing guest as she had smiled to welcome him; she had taken a sentimental interest in him at one time, but he had become such a dull fellow of late. "Sure you wish to go back?" she asked; and he enumerated in detail the things he meant to do in preparation for the coming of his wife.

"When I get married I hope I'll get an attentive husband like you," Susy declared. "And that he and I will make as loving a pair as you and Juliet."

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The speech was a sneer, as Eglamore knew, but not the less did his loyalty to his wife and his love compel him to answer it.

"It would be impossible for two people to love each other more devotedly than Juliet and I do," he solemnly asserted.

The fact that for all her faults he loved her no less—that, whatever she said or did, he could not possibly love her less—was firmly implanted in his mind. His short married life had held torturing experiences; but at the end of it, when his wife left him to such a loneliness as he had not imagined, he knew that she was infinitely dearer to him than at the beginning. He loved her without reason, never stopping to ask why; loved her as she loved herself, without thinking; because he must, because he did.

"You are a model couple, we know,"

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Susy said, showing all her teeth. "Let us hear when Juliet comes back, so that we can run up and see her."

She said it with the more heartiness because it was openly reported in Hale that Juliet would never return. She felt it was not incumbent on her any longer to back up Clarence, and she told Isaac Eglamore that afternoon that Juliet and Clarence were looking forward to inheriting every farthing of his money.

In the home to which Clarence returned he had lived for eight years of happiness ; he had lived there, somewhat unhappily, for two months with his wife. Yet, not of those long years of freedom from care, of bachelor irresponsibility, bachelor friendships and hospitality, was the place eloquent ; but every piece of furniture, every window-nook, every flower that

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blew, every bird that sang, spoke to him for ever and ever of Juliet.

One night only of it he endured—lying wide awake through hours of darkness, Juliet's voice in his ear, her spontaneous laughter, the feel of her hair tossed warm across his throat, the scent of it in his nostrils. The dawn, finding his aching eyes still open, showed him the chair on which she sat before the toilet-table; the glass which had reflected her round, childish face. He recalled the pretty litter of her belongings about the room—for Juliet missed the services of the maid who used to wait on her and could not often remember to put her clothes away—the slippers on which he stamped as he made his way to the door. He had hurt his foot and scolded her rather severely the last time he had done it, he remembered. If only—peeping from under

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the bed, lying heel upward as she had kicked it off, beneath a chair—he might see one of her slippers now!

He hung his head out of bed and looked in vain. His heart was sick with longing. When the morning was still young he got up. Harriet and cook, as they scurried through their dressing, saw him from their window furiously up-rooting the weeds which choked the flower border.

“Sure the missus ain’t coming back?” one of them said.

The place—with tea going before breakfast, in the afternoon, at night; with baths sometimes twice a day; hot water being always carried into her bedroom, and all sorts of fancies—wasn’t to be compared to what it was with only master to wait on, and him almost always out, they declared. Both regarded Eglamore’s spirited

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performance in the long borders with distrust.

Isaac Eglamore was sitting in the room he alone frequented of all the beautiful rooms in his house, when his nephew, who had been too impatient to await his uncle's arrival at the office, appeared.

"I want to get away for a few days," Clarence told the senior partner; and went on to speak of business which must be transacted in his absence.

Uncle Isaac was in a silent mood that morning, and had little more than grunts with which to receive his nephew's remarks.

"Where are you going?" he inquired at length.

"To Birmingham, to bring back Juliet," Clarence said.

"And can't Juliet come back alone? Or, as she has been so long away, can't she stay away a little longer?"

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"Have you any objection to my going?" Clarence asked, with a hint of offence in his voice.

The old man took another piece of dry toast—he prided himself on eating nothing but dry toast for his first meal; in Hale, for some strange reason, the fact, and that he ate it without butter, was regarded as being to his credit. "Since you ask me—yes; I have an objection," he said. "Your leaving is inconvenient just now, because I am thinking of taking a holiday myself."

Clarence heard the announcement with as much surprise as if his uncle had declared his intention of taking a kingdom. "You!" he said, and stared at the old man, unfamiliar in his smart grey suit. He followed the direction of the elder man's gaze and found it fixed upon an object which stood between his plate and the tea-pot.

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This was a photograph in a silver frame ; and, looking closer, Clarence recognised the wide smile, the small, alert eyes, the broad cheek-bones familiar to him. Such a portrait of his dear friend Susy Plain stood on his own writing-table at home. More than once Juliet had flung it into the waste-paper basket, but always when Clarence had been by, loyally to fish it out again.

Clarence looked at the photograph in its present position, looked at the modish cut of his uncle's summer suit, formed into a convincing whole in his mind fragmentary evidence to which he had given no heed of words, of tones, of glances ; and the news which his uncle, still regarding the picture of the fair one, proceeded to give him was stale when it fell on his ears.

"I am about to be married," the lawyer

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said. "Very quietly ; in London ; and I shall be away ten days or a fortnight. The office will want all your attention while I am away. It has been Susy's particular wish, and mine, that the marriage should not be announced until it has taken place ; but you, of course, must know of it, and I have her leave to tell you to-day. I leave for London to-morrow."

"I can quite understand it will be more agreeable to you both not to hear what people say of your marriage," Clarence said, with white lips.

His uncle's command to him to keep to his post would hardly by itself have held Eglamore back from Juliet. But the knock-down blow of Isaac's marriage had not only altered his position, and destroyed all the hopes of advancement on which he had confidently built, but had made it seem to him at first im-

A SWASHING BLOW

possible that he could now approach his wife.

In their consenting to his marriage with their daughter he knew that the prospect of his inheriting his uncle's large fortune had been a strong inducement to her parents. He knew that Juliet herself had looked forward to a day on which he and she would be rich. To her eyes of twenty years, Isaac Eglamore had appeared of such an age that it was not to be expected of him to totter through a world he could so feebly enjoy for much longer; and she had sometimes talked of what they would do when Uncle Isaac's house and all its handsome old furniture would be theirs. Clarence who had rebuked her, as in duty bound, had been as sure of his inheritance as she. Now, with Susy a couple of years older than himself, what chance did he stand?

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His share of the business was but a small one: he was told now with scant ceremony that it would be no larger while the head of the firm lived.

Bitterly in his remembrance dwelt the humiliating remarks of his mother-in-law on his poverty, and the shifts to which her daughter was reduced. How could he face the woman with her unsparing tongue, her fierce ambition for her child and herself, and say to her: "As I am, so I shall always be. I have no prospects now; I can never afford a better home for Juliet. I have come to eat my words, to show the poor thing that I am all round; to take Juliet back into poverty"?

The hunger of the heart from which he so cruelly suffered might drive him in time even to this degradation, but not yet —not yet.

CHAPTER XVI

JULIET HANGS THE PORTRAITS

THE local paper containing the announcement of the Eglamore-Plain marriage was directed to Mrs Clarence Eglamore by the bride's own hand. Juliet found it, among other papers which had not been forwarded to her, awaiting her at Marchmont when she and her father returned there.

It might have been expected that her husband, who had left her willingly, would not greatly have mourned his wife; that he might have been upheld by the reflection that if her death had been accelerated by his action she had at least brought it on herself. But Mr

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Cummin was a tender-hearted man, and a man of tender conscience, and he took deep blame to himself.

"This is my work," he had said as he stood by his wife's grave.

Not one word, save in praise of her, did he henceforth speak of Juliet's mother ; never did he allude to the letter he had written Juliet, or take upon himself to repeat the advice therein given. The pair clung to each other ; but, emulating his reticence, Juliet, who, in her mother's lifetime, had longed to tell her father the history of affairs between Clarence and herself, now felt, without reflecting on the dead woman, she could not explain that there was more than met the eye in their separation.

"You are longing to get back to your husband," he always said, while mutely pleading for more of her companionship.

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And Juliet could not bring her tongue to utter the words : " I must wait to go to him until he asks me."

They came slowly homeward, stopping a day or so in each place of interest ; looking, with eyes that ached with tears, openly and privately shed, upon pictures which for them in their preoccupation had no meaning, gazing at churches with a pitiful, simulated attention. Marchmont was lovely in the autumn sunshine when they reached it. They had longed to be back under the familiar home influences ; but the prim orderliness of the beautiful house and grounds weighed on both their spirits.

"What is the good of it all to me?" the widower asked drearily.

Juliet cried for her mother as even yet she had not cried, wandering, lonely, through rooms which had been furnished

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with such fashionable elegance. Surely it was impossible that in none of them should she come upon her mother, surveying with the unshrinking eyes of the autocrat her domain, ready to detect any flaw, alert to discover possible improvement; ruthless in her intention to have perfection about her, let who might suffer!

They had been her bond slaves—father and daughter—trembling beneath her sway, and quite ignorant what to make of their freedom when it was theirs.

“Isn’t this the man whose property was to have been Clarence’s?” Mr Cummin asked as he read the paragraph Juliet pointed out to him. “Surely this must be a bad job for Clarence, then?”

Juliet, overcome with the strangeness of the news, thought, not taking in at once the consequences of the step, it must

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be a shock to him. "They're a horrid old pair. I don't like them at all," she told her father.

"But this man's money — Clarence spoke of it to me as a certainty. How old is the woman he has married?"

"Ever so old," Juliet told him, with the vagueness of her own years. "Thirty, perhaps."

"Thirty! But this means ruin!" Mr Cummin said.

Juliet looked at him, startled. "Clarence could earn ever so much at his office," she said. "You can't think what a clever lawyer he is, father!"

"No country lawyer's business is worth much nowadays," Mr Cummin declared; "besides, this is a grasping old man. From what your husband told me I could see he was keeping a tight rein. This is a terrible blow to Clarence, my dear,

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mark my words. He is going to be a poor man all his life now."

Juliet's face flamed like a crimson rose, she flew up from her chair, her eyes alight. "Then I think I'll go to him, father," she said; "I—I haven't wished to leave you; but now, if you don't mind, I will go to Clarence at once."

She refused her father's offer to go with her; she wanted no witness of the meeting between her and her husband.

"At least, wire him by what train to meet you," Mr Cummin said. But even this she would not do.

She arrived at The Cottage in the afternoon of a day when Uncle Isaac's marriage was not a week old. The cab which bore her, leisurely, down the tree-bordered road passed cook, hatless and capless, her sleeves turned up, her apron flung over her arms, walking along the

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path in affectionate converse with the butcher's boy, leading his pony alongside. Harriet, capless also, stood by the garden gate and called witticisms after the interesting pair. Juliet pretended not to see either. She wanted to be very nice to cook and Harriet. It would be so dreadful to feel that anyone should be sorry, her wanderings of foot and spirit over, she had come home at last.

"What a homelike little smiling place it is!" she said to herself. How often—oh, how often! in the drear splendours of Marchmont, in the big hotels of foreign towns, she had longed for the dear familiarity of the insignificant little spot.

She got out of the cab slowly in order to give the startled Harriet time to rush in and answer the door, as if never, never since her mistress's departure had she been out of hearing of the bell.

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The Virginian creeper was hanging in vivid scarlet streamers over every window, the lace-trimmed blinds were drawn up awry, the curtains, freshly hung for her first home-coming, tucked untidily away. Weeds were on the gravel path, the grass had not been cut, the doorstep — oh, Harriet! oh, cook! — was dirty. Ah, how delightful it would be to put things right again—or not to put them right! To sit with Clarence and revel in the fact that things were not ship-shape at all, either in their home or their fortunes, but that they were together, and nothing else mattered!

Beyond Harriet, hurriedly attired in the raiment of officialdom, in the tiny hall, a portmanteau ready packed was standing. Juliet's eyes fell on it at once, and her heart sank.

“The master is a-going away to-day,

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and will call for it on his way to the station," Harriet explained.

"Where is he going?"

Of course Harriet did not know.

"For how long is he to be away?"

The master had not said.

Juliet could but remember the return to Marchmont of her mother, and how her father had taken flight. Clarence had had notice of her home-coming—she had all along suspected her father of an intention to telegraph him to come to Peterborough to meet her—and was fleeing before her face. But for the accident of her having caught a train which was just starting she would have arrived a couple of hours later in the day and would have found him gone!

"When had the master first mentioned his intention to go away?"

"Not until lunch. He had barely

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give himself time to bolt his food, had flew upstairs and packed his clo'es as if he hadn't a minute to wait. He'd had a sudden call, and was going, right unexpected like, he said."

Yes; he had learnt of her coming; was giving up home, everything, to escape her!

Juliet was in deep mourning—mourning which had been made abroad, and was therefore laden with crape; a long veil of crape floated down her slender back; there was no relief to the sable hue, and Juliet did not think it became her. The heavy black emphasised her loss of flesh, made her cheeks too pale. Her husband should not see her so, she had determined; she would run up to her room on her return and put on a certain white wrapper which became her well; she would perhaps get a rose from the

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garden to supply the colour her face had lost.

This plan was forgotten now; she would not even go to her room, she was too lifeless to pull off a glove.

She opened the dining - room door. Cousin Anna's pictures screamed at her from the walls. Never, never again could she bear the sight of those masterpieces; how garish and ugly they were, of what sad, sad things they spoke! She retreated, and turned to the drawing-room, which was in darkness, the shutters not having been unfastened. The gloom accorded with Juliet's mood. When Harriet made a clatter with the shutters, flinging them back, noisily dashing up the window so that sun and air flooded the little space, she shrank and would have turned from the light.

"She's in a nice way, I can tell you!"

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Harriet reported to cook. "Puttin' on airs a'ready, and as sulky as ye please."

"Comin' and takin' folk unaweer like this! Right low and sneaky of 'er, I call it!" cook chimed in. "You bet, she twigged the master's lunching weren't cleared away!"

"Must go pokin' her nose into the drorin'-room where the shutters was up! Wha's the good of openin' of 'em, and dustin' in a room no one don't never set foot into? And so I'll up and tell 'er—say a word to me."

"Wait till she let on to me about walkin' down the road wi' my young chap!" cook threatened. "She'll see what she'll get!"

"Let's have the first word of her," Harriet, happily inspired, cried.

The upshot of which consultation was

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the appearance at the drawing - room door of the domestic retinue.

Cook, as having the bigger wage, was appointed spokeswoman : "If you please, 'm, bein' as you've come home, Harriet and me don't feel equals to the work, and wishes to leave you this day month, 'm," she recited.

Juliet regarded the pair, hardly hearing, not at all caring ; and at the instant came the sound of wheels, of a horse pulled up smartly at the front gate. Her knees shaking beneath her, her face white as a rag, Juliet got up.

"It's your master," she said in a voice no more than a whisper.

Cook and Harriet made a dash for the portmanteau in the hall.

"He wants to catch his train ; don't —don't say I'm here," Juliet faltered.

She would have hidden from him who

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was running away from her, but she must see him first—just once before he left her, and she died as her mother had done, and he was sent for to come and stand beside her grave.

She stumbled to the window, pulling the curtain ever such an inch aside, and saw him, who had sprung from the cab, standing by the gate he had pulled open for Harriet and the portmanteau. She said his name to herself many times, miserably, under her breath: "Clarence! Clarence! Clarence!"

He threw the portmanteau on the seat by the driver, said a word to him, looked at his watch, banged the cab door upon himself as he jumped in. The wheels, as the cab turned round, seemed to grind on Juliet's heart.

Her face was as white as the lace curtain she held in her hand, but she looked still.

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In response to the whip the horse broke into a gallop, the cab lumbered past the scanty leaved laburnums, the yellowing poplars and little lime-trees of the hedge. She had to pull the curtain farther back to see it now.

It had stopped. What blessed miracle had happened to keep it in sight a minute still? She saw her husband's head thrust from the window, even caught a note of his voice. He was springing from the cab, running back——

She forgot to hide as he came up the garden path; but he never turned an eye upon the window. The front door stood open.

"My tobacco pouch!" he called. "Hi! Quick! Harriet! My tobacco pouch!"

Harriet came running. "I see it soon as you left, sir. 'Twas on——"

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He snatched it from her hand, went running down the path again.

"Clarence!" Juliet screamed.

He stopped dead; but was slow in turning round.

Often he had heard her calling him. His senses had played him strange tricks of late with Juliet's form and voice. Such a call had roused him from dreams of her more than once.

It required a moment's pause to assure himself of reality now. Then he turned and looked at the window from which the voice had come. No trace of Juliet there; but he knew he had not been deceived.

Quickly he reached the door. "Juliet!" he called, but softly, under his breath, as if afraid of the sound of her name upon his lips. "Juliet!" he called in the hall. Timorously he opened the door

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of the little drawing-room. "Juliet!" he breathed.

Juliet, who had sunk to the floor by the chair in the window, and was clinging to it, hiding her face, said not a word till he went and knelt beside her and pulled her into his embrace.

"Father said you were ruined; so I thought I might come back to you," she sobbed out to him there.

A broken word or two, a few kisses on eyes wet with tears, and where is the need of eloquence?

In the moment when Juliet had heard him softly speak her name she forgot that she had believed her husband to be running away from her. It was quite a long time before she remembered to ask him where he had been going on that interrupted journey.

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"I was going for you," then he told her. "Uncle Isaac is still on his miserable old honeymoon, there is no one to attend to a thing at the office ; but I couldn't stand it any longer. I was going for you."

.

Eglamore was a perfectly sane person ; even in the moment that he learnt of Mrs Cummin's death he did not forget where the fault of his misfortunes and his wife's had lain. He looked out upon the future now without a fear ; very, very tenderly he looked back upon the past.

"I suppose we were fools," he said : "but weren't we happy, sweet?"

"Harriet and cook have given notice to leave," she told him, and looked at him with a little nervousness. "It's my fault, Clarence ; they don't like me."

"They're best gone," Clarence said, who had grown tired of cook and Harriet.

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“And I think, Clarence—I really think I can manage with one servant. Do you know that in the first year of her married life dear mother had only one? She never told me, but poor father, who talks much of those early days, told me. And he says, Clarence, that although he and mother were poor then it was the best of all their time together; and that dear mother worked so hard and was quite happy. Father does not think, Clarence, that money makes people any happier. He was wild to get it, he says, for mother’s sake; but they were never so happy when once it was theirs. I should like to work for you, Clarence, as dear mother did for father.”

But Clarence would not hear of the plan. Not even before the post brought him a letter from his father-in-law saying that under the altered condition of his

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domestic affairs he found himself in a position to allow his only child five hundred a year.

That evening, dinner being over (it was better served than usual, for cook, having made up her mind to leave, had also bethought her of her "character"), and the time between that meal and bed half spent, Harriet appeared to announce the delivery of a large parcel by the railway cart for which the master was requested to sign.

The ceremony performed, Eglamore and his wife gazed upon the large wooden case introduced to their presence and placed against the wall, idly wondering what it contained.

"You have been buying something you can't afford, naughty boy!" Juliet affirmed.

Not a ha'penny had he spent awaste since she had gone, he promised her.

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She coaxed his hair approvingly for that. He was sitting on the carpet, his back propped against her knees, his hands clasped around his own. Good boy! he must have saved quite a lot! Had he won at Bridge too?

He had not touched a card since she left.

"Not even with Susy—that good old fellow?"

"My respected aunt-in-law? Ugh! How that woman contrived to set my teeth on edge of late!"

She bent delightedly over the smooth head on her knees. "I just want to whisper one little teeny word to you, Clarence. Only one. You won't be angry?"

"Whisper on, sweet."

"I hate old Susy. And her great laugh; and all her great brown teeth."

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"Yes. And the way she slaps you on the back when your heart is breaking, and stamps on all your corns, and is so devilishly cheerful over your griefs. Confound her—I hate her too!"

"Dear, dearest old boy!" She had to bend her lithe body double to lay her lips upon his head, but she did it. "Darling! Oh, you are a darling, Clarence. I do so most awfully love you."

"I don't hate her so much as Sands, Juliet."

"Don't you?" She sat upright then, very thoughtful. "Go and see what is in that great clumsy case," she told him. He was too comfortable to wish to move; but she, with a child's curiosity over a parcel, urged him.

"Oh, I know what it is," he said, straightening himself, having at length

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examined the address. "It's nothing of much importance; it'll keep, Juliet."

A little added colour had come in his face. Juliet did not understand his embarrassment. She must have in the screw-driver, and, he refusing to help, must undo the case, not without damage to her hands, herself.

The contents proved to be two pictures; and as she lifted them out, she saw that they were the portraits—in a wonderful manner restored, the injury by the fender, the slits by the knife obliterated—of Clarence's father and mother. The same which used at one time to hang in those fireside niches which now Cousin Anna's copies from Landseer adorned.

Juliet laid the pictures hastily on the table. On her face was a look as if ghosts, not portraits, had confronted her.

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"Oh!" she breathed, and looked from them to her husband and back to the portraits again. "Oh, Clarence."

"Haven't they restored them well?" Clarence asked. "They—they are going into my dressing-room, Juliet."

"No!" Juliet said.

She mounted a chair and took from its nook in the niche the copy of "Dignity and Impudence," dragged the chair across and pulled down the companion work of art from the companion recess. "Now give me, one at a time, the pictures," she said.

He brought a portrait to her. "Let me do it for you, sweet," he said, very tenderly. But she would not allow it.

"I pulled them down. Let me hang them up," she said.

So, he standing by, his arm about her knees to steady her on the chair, Juliet

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hung the Eglamore portraits once more in their original positions.

Which feat accomplished, her husband lifted her from the chair, and carried her, she laughing and clinging to him, upstairs to bed.

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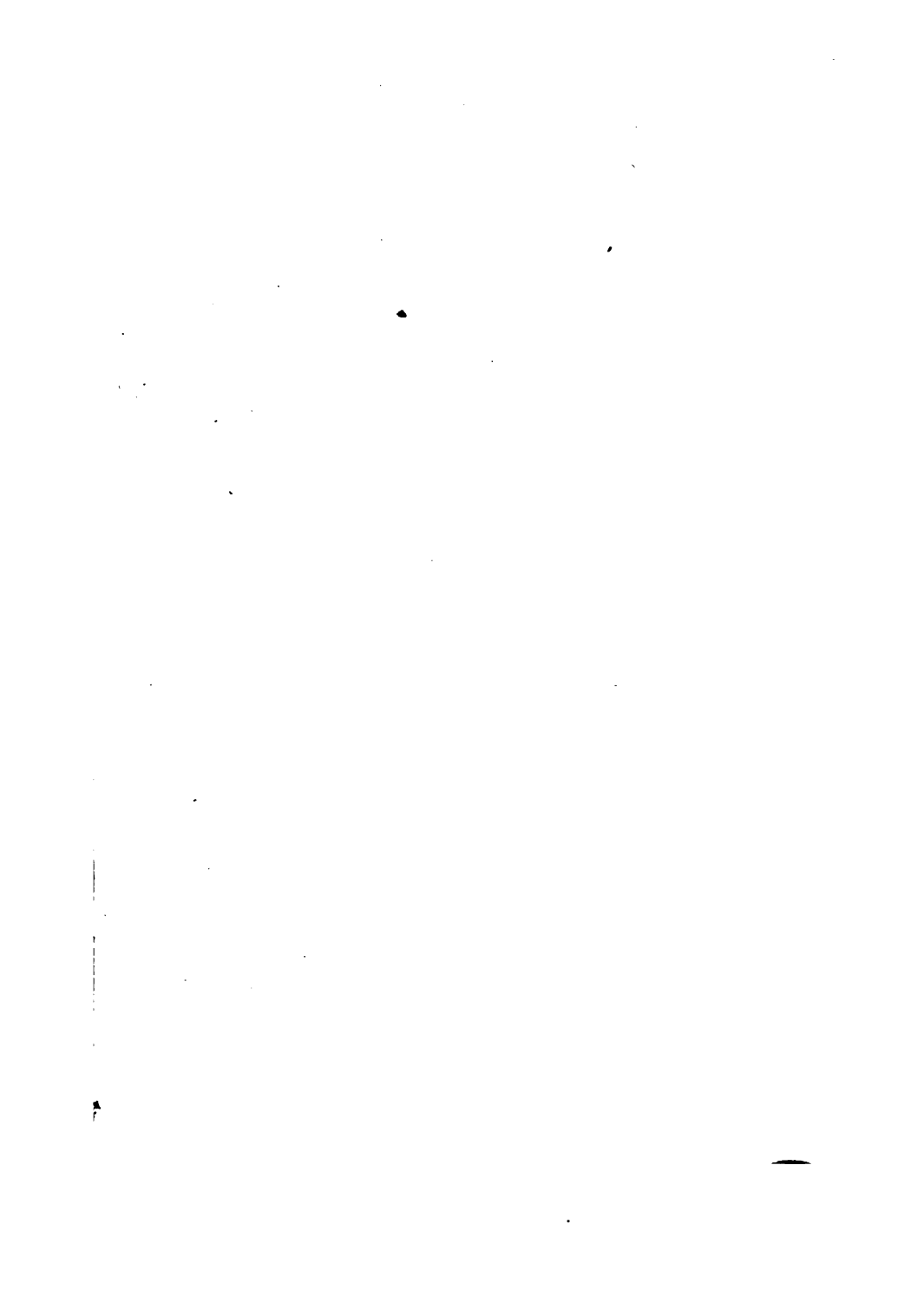
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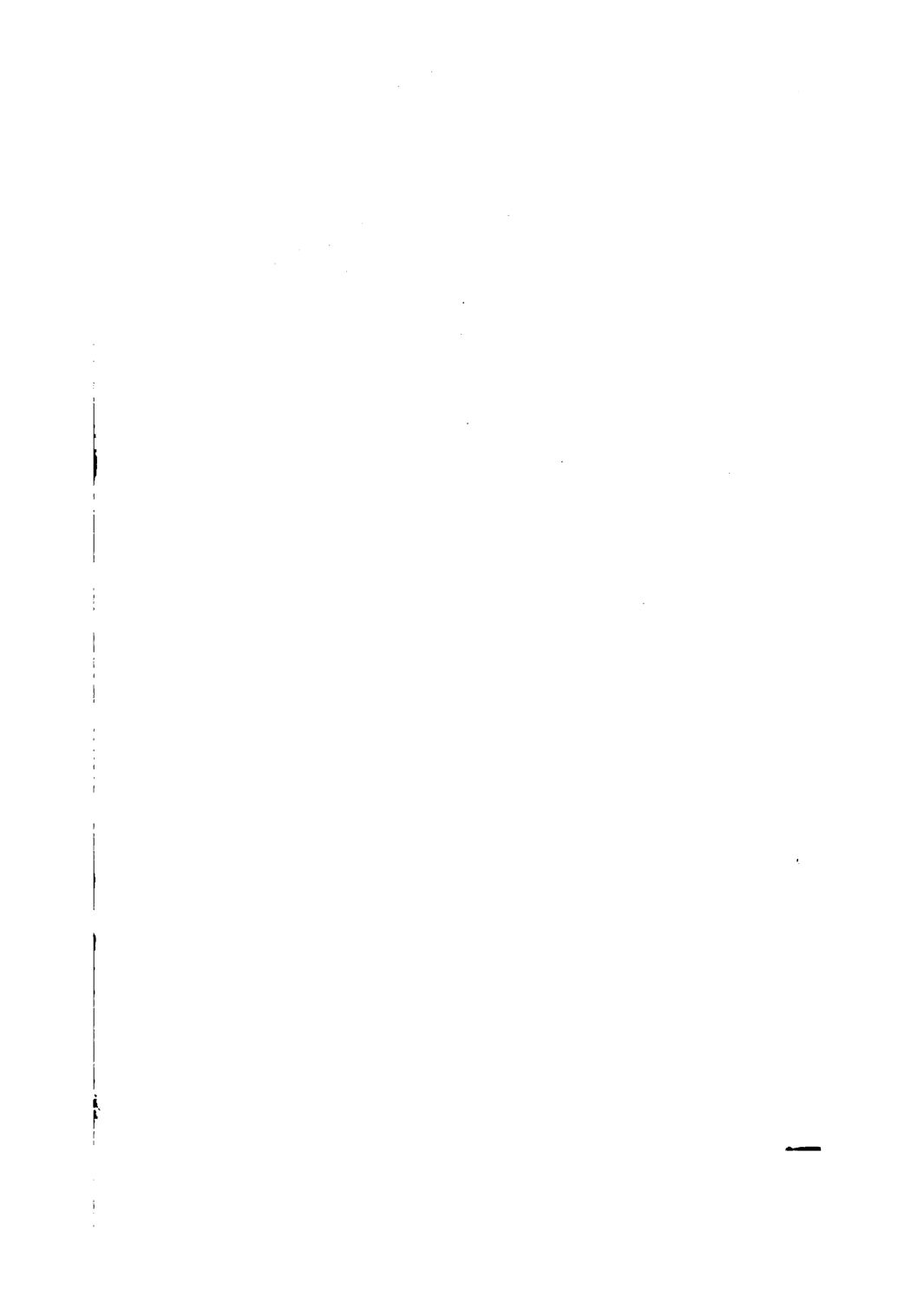
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